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150149

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BUTLER AND TANNER LTD, FROME AND LONDON
MADE IN ENGLAND

LABURNUM GROVE

Produced at the Duchess Theatre, London, W.C.2, on November 28th, 1933,
with the following cast of characters:

ELSIE RADFERN	<i>Margery Pickard.</i>
MRS. (LUCY) BAXLEY	<i>Ethel Oleridge.</i>
BERNARD BAXLEY	<i>Melville Cooper.</i>
GEORGE RADFERN	<i>Edmund Gwenn.</i>
HAROLD RUSS	<i>Francis James.</i>
JOE FLETTEN	<i>James Harcourt.</i>
MRS. (DOROTHY) RADFERN	<i>Mary Jerrold.</i>
INSPECTOR STACK	<i>David Hawthorne.</i>
SERGEANT MORRIS	<i>Douglas Payne.</i>

The Play produced by CEDRIC HARDWIGKE.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The whole action takes place in the living-room of the Radferns' house,
"Ferndale," Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green, a suburb of North London.

ACT I.—Sunday Evening.

ACT II.—SCENE 1.—Early Monday Morning.

SCENE 2.—Monday Afternoon.

ACT III.—Monday Evening.

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Name of the town.
Name of the theatre or hall.
Date of the performance or performances.
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Amount remitted.

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Photograph by Stage Photo Co

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LABURNUM GROVE

ACT I

SCENE.—*The living-room in the Radferns' house, "Ferndale," Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green—a suburb in North London. The room is brightly, comfortably furnished in a suburban style. (See Photograph of Scene and Property Plot.)*

TIME.—*Sunday evening in late summer, still daylight at first.*

When the CURTAIN rises MRS. BAXLEY and ELSIE are discovered seated at a small table, down L. MRS. BAXLEY is in the armchair and ELSIE on the pouf. MRS. BAXLEY is a woman in her forties, dressed in a smart-shabby style, a mixture of silliness and calculating selfishness. ELSIE is a pretty but rather petulant and discontented girl of twenty or so, the kind you see in the High Street of every fairly prosperous suburb.

MRS. BAXLEY (*indicating the cards, which are set out in seven packs, face downwards on table*). To yourself . . . your home . . . your wish. Have you wished, Elsie?

ELSIE. Yes, Auntie. Very definitely.

MRS. BAXLEY. What you do expect—what you don't expect and what's sure to come true. Mind you, I'm not always in the mood, you know. Sometimes I can't see things at all, and then at other times, it's all as clear as anything, and everything I tell people comes true. It's a gift, you know. One can't control it.

ELSIE (*with signs of excitement*). Well, you must be in the mood to-night, Aunt Lucy.

MRS. BAXLEY. Why? What's exciting you to-night? I know there's something.

ELSIE (*rising and going to table C.*). I'll tell you afterwards. It would spoil it if I told you now. You must tell me things first.

(*She sits on downstage L. end of table and takes a sweet from box on table.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. All right, but I hope your mother won't come back in the middle of it, because she doesn't like me to read the cards for you—she told me so, the other day.

ELSIE. Mother won't be back from Mrs. Repington's until after

supper. That's why she got supper all ready (*indicating sideboard*) before she went. So you needn't worry about her.

MRS. BAXLEY. All right then. (*She picks up first lot of cards and examines them, and does the same with succeeding lots throughout the speeches that follow. She assumes the usual far-away mystical air of the clairvoyant, which is in sharp and comic contrast to her tone and manner when making remarks not directly concerned with the fortune-telling.*) Um . . . Um . . . Well, the first thing I see, Elsie, is a great surprise. Yes, you're going to have a great surprise.

ELSIE. A surprise? When?

MRS. BAXLEY. Very soon.

ELSIE. How soon? Next week?

MRS. BAXLEY. Perhaps. Perhaps sooner.

ELSIE. Well, it can't be much sooner. It's Sunday night and nearly next week now.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, it's coming very soon. And it isn't a nice surprise. I don't think you'll like it.

ELSIE (*reproachfully*). Oh—Aunt Lucy!

MRS. BAXLEY. I can't help it. I'm only telling you what's here in the cards.

ELSIE. What's it about?

MRS. BAXLEY (*brooding over more cards*). I think it's something to do with a medium-coloured man.

ELSIE (*thinking hard*). A medium-coloured man? Is he young?

MRS. BAXLEY. No, I don't think he is. Your home comes into it.

ELSIE (*disappointed*). Oh!

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, I think the medium-coloured man must be your father.

ELSIE (*rising and coming back to Mrs. Baxley*). Is it—is it about an engagement?

MRS. BAXLEY. No, I don't see an engagement connected with it. I think you're simply going to get a great surprise from your father.

ELSIE (*disgusted, returning to table and sitting on it again*). That's just like the cards. They're always like that. A great surprise—from Dad—of all people! I suppose the great surprise will be that he's grown two tomatoes in his greenhouse. Or they're going to play Handel's Largo for him on the wireless. Or he can't find his pipe or one of his silly detective stories or something. Dad!

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, it's all here—quite plain.

ELSIE (*rising, coming back and sitting on pouf*). Perhaps you're not in the mood to-night, Auntie.

MRS. BAXLEY (*coldly*). As a matter of fact, I am seeing very clearly to-night. But it was you who asked me to read the cards, Elsie, and if you don't choose to accept what I see, I'll stop. (*She starts to rise.*)

ELSIE (*stopping her*). No. Sorry. Go on.

MRS. BAXLEY (*examining more cards*). Also a great surprise for two people staying in your house. And they're going to leave quite soon.

ELSIE. That must be you and Uncle Bernard. You're the only people staying in the house, besides Dad and Mother and me.

MRS. BAXLEY (*not pleased at this*). Humph! Very queer. I can't imagine what surprise we'll get and anyhow we hadn't thought of leaving you yet and nothing's been said about our going. Humph! Perhaps I'm not getting it right after all.

ELSIE. Go on. Tell me some more.

MRS. BAXLEY (*examining last lots of cards*). You're going to travel. And quite soon.

ELSIE (*excitedly*). I'm not, am I?

MRS. BAXLEY. You are. It's all here. A journey. Strange beds. Crossing water. And it'll come as a great surprise. This isn't the same surprise as the other, though. That's quite different. You're going on a long journey very soon, across water.

ELSIE. It sounds too good to be true. (*She rises and pirouettes with excitement.*) You're not just making this up to please me, are you?

MRS. BAXLEY (*on her dignity*). Certainly not. I never make up anything to please anybody.

ELSIE. Then it's just the cards again. (*During this speech she goes up L. of table, above it, down R. of it and eventually sits on down-stage edge of it.*) They call anything a long journey, just to make it exciting. They've had me before like that. They tell you about a journey and crossing water and a strange bed and a fair woman and a dark man until you think you're in for something marvellously exciting, and then it turns out you're going to spend the night at Aunt Florrie's at Sydenham. I'll believe in this long journey when I see it. I'll bet it turns out to be like that great surprise from the medium-coloured man—just something dull about Dad. (*She eats a sweet.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*putting the cards together*). Next time you'd better tell your own fortune. I've told you all I could see.

ELSIE (*getting off the table and going to MRS. BAXLEY again*). But you've missed the really important thing. Wasn't there anything about an engagement for me?

MRS. BAXLEY. Not a sign of one.

ELSIE (*triumphantly*). Well, that's where they're wrong—and it just shows you—(*sitting on pouf*) because I'm really engaged now, and I'll be properly engaged to-night.

MRS. BAXLEY. Engaged! Well, I am surprised.

ELSIE. You don't sound very pleasantly surprised, Aunt Lucy.

MRS. BAXLEY. If you must know, I'm not.

ELSIE. Why?

MRS. BAXLEY. Because I think you're too young to be engaged.

ELSIE. I'm not too young. I'm twenty.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, what's twenty. You're not old enough to know your own mind.

ELSIE. Yes, I am. I don't see what age has got to do with knowing your own mind. I've always been old enough to know my own mind.

MRS. BAXLEY. That's what you think. Is it that young man who was here the other night?

ELSIE. Yes, Harold Russ. And I'm bringing him here to supper to-night and he's going to ask Dad.

MRS. BAXLEY. Funny time to come, isn't it, when he's had all day to do it in?

ELSIE. He couldn't help it. He's been helping a friend of his to sell second-hand cars, and he had to take a man out in one of them to-night. He wants to start in the second-hand car business for himself, when he gets some capital.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, I can tell you one thing, Elsie. Your Dad doesn't like him much.

ELSIE. I know that. *(She rises.)* But then Dad doesn't really know him. And you know what Dad is. If Harold was as dull as ditchwater and lived here in Laburnum Grove or somewhere in Shooters Green, and went into the City in the morning and came home at night and pottered about in a greenhouse, Dad would think he was marvellous. *(She fetches the box of sweets from the table and comes back with them, sitting on pouf again.)* But just because Harold's smart and wants to get on and once laughed at Laburnum Grove and Shooters Green——

(Enter BERNARD BAXLEY from hall door R., a rather glossy, shifty fellow in his forties, always either over-confident or uneasy.)

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, I don't see anything to laugh at.

BAXLEY *(at door)*. Who's laughing at what? *(He shuts the door.)*

ELSIE. I'm talking about Harold Russ, Uncle.

BAXLEY *(crossing towards ELSIE)*. Oh—your boy friend who was here the other night. *(He goes to sideboard L., takes a banana, then goes to chair L. of table and sits astride of it.)*

ELSIE. Yes. Dad doesn't like him because he once made fun of Laburnum Grove here and Shooters Green.

MRS. BAXLEY. And I see nothing to laugh at. It's a very nice, respectable, refined neighbourhood.

ELSIE. That's just it. It's all so deadly dull, all slippers and greenhouses. Nothing ever happens except that the people at "Ben Machree" have bought a new car or the woman at "Heather Brow" is going to have a baby.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, wait until you're going to have a baby, you'll find it exciting enough.

BAXLEY *(leaning over the back of the chair, eating the banana)*.

Ah—Elsie's like me. She doesn't care for this ultra-respectable, humdrum, suburban sort of existence. I don't mind paying it a visit—like this—just while I'm wondering what to do next, but I couldn't live in it. I want life. There's no life here. What is there here for a man who's been out East? (*He takes a bite at the banana.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*emphatically*). I can tell you what there is for a woman who's been out East—three decent meals a day and a good night's sleep.

BAXLEY. Yes, but Lucy, you never got into the life out there.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, you didn't seem sorry to get out of it.

ELSIE. Well, I agree with Uncle Bernard. And I know Harold does too. (*Rising and putting box of sweets on sideboard.*) Oh—I promised to meet him at the Tube station in ten minutes. I must fly.

(*ELSIE crosses R. and hurries out through hall door.*)

BAXLEY. What's on?

MRS. BAXLEY (*rising and going to L. of BAXLEY*). She's got herself engaged to that chap, and she's bringing him here so that he can ask George's permission.

BAXLEY. Oh—that's it, is it?

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, and another thing. What he's after is borrowing some money from George to set him up in the second-hand car business.

BAXLEY. How do you know?

MRS. BAXLEY. I don't know. But it's a good guess—from something that Elsie let drop. Besides, that chap wouldn't bother asking her father's permission if he wasn't after something.

BAXLEY. Well, how does that affect us?

MRS. BAXLEY. Did you see that man—?

BAXLEY. Simpson? Yes. And they won't look at me unless I can put down four hundred and fifty pounds, and they only give me until Wednesday.

(*There is a pause, during which MRS. BAXLEY crosses above table to hall door R., looks out, shuts it and sits R. of table.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Then the sooner we ask for that four hundred and fifty pounds the better.

BAXLEY. Shall I do it direct through him or had you better try and work it through Dorothy? (*He rises, turns his chair in to table and sits again facing her.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Not through Dorothy.

BAXLEY. Why not? After all, she's your sister.

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, but I think she's getting a bit fed-up with us. We've been here nearly a fortnight this time, and it's the third time we've stayed with them during this last year. And she

knows you've been borrowing pretty freely from George. How much have you had out of him now?

BAXLEY. Well, you know. *(He has by now finished eating the banana and puts the skin on L. of table.)*

MRS. BAXLEY *(grimly)*. Oh no, I don't. I only know about the amounts you've mentioned to me, that's all.

BAXLEY. Well, that's all there's been.

MRS. BAXLEY. And the rest!

BAXLEY. There might be *(referring to pocket-book, which he takes from inner pocket)* perhaps ten bob here and there—just something and nothing. *(He replaces pocket-book.)*

MRS. BAXLEY. Too many somethings and nothings. Dorothy may be my sister and easy-going as a rule, but I think she's had about enough. She's been rather sharp with both of us, I've noticed, these last few days. So you try George himself. He's good-natured enough for anything.

BAXLEY. So he ought to be. Nothing to worry about. Just stuck in the one business and let it keep him. Money for nothing. You've only got to look at him to see that it must be money for nothing. He doesn't know he's born.

MRS. BAXLEY. He ought to be married to you for a bit and then he would.

BAXLEY. All right, all right. The point is, are we going to try him to-night?

MRS. BAXLEY. We'd better try him now, before Elsie's darling Harold begins borrowing.

BAXLEY. Is Dorothy in?

MRS. BAXLEY. No, she's visiting a friend of hers, Mrs. Repington, and she won't be back until after supper. So now's the time.

BAXLEY. He's out there in the greenhouse, I suppose?

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, call him in.

BAXLEY. Half a minute. *(He rises, pushes chair under table and goes up L.C.)* I haven't worked out the tactics yet. Might be a good idea to sort of take a high hand with him. After all, I've seen the world, I've been somewhere, I've done something, and he hasn't. *(He has by now worked down to L.C. He puts one foot on pouf, indicating armchair.)* Now suppose I—

MRS. BAXLEY. Suppose you just call him in and get done with it. And if you won't, I will. *(She goes towards greenhouse doors up R. and calls:)* George, George.

RADFERN *(off, at back)*. All right. Just coming.

(MRS. BAXLEY comes back to above chair R. of table, tries to whisper something across to BAXLEY, who cannot hear.)

BAXLEY. What?

(RADFERN enters through the greenhouse doors up R. He is a man about fifty with nothing remarkable about his appearance, though

even at the first there should be a certain quiet assurance and authority visible beneath his easy manner. At this hour, he is very much the suburban householder at ease, wearing slippers and an old coat, and smoking a pipe. He is carrying two small tomatoes and he displays these with an air of humorous triumph. He comes to R. of MRS. BAXLEY to show her the tomatoes.)

RADFERN (*holding out tomatoes*). Look at these. What more do you want? All fresh.

MRS. BAXLEY. Charming.

BAXLEY. They look very nice, George. Won't you sit down? (*He invites him to sit in armchair L.*)

(RADFERN crosses behind MRS. BAXLEY above table, down to R. of BAXLEY to show him the tomatoes.)

RADFERN. Beautiful tomatoes. The Special Radfern brand. Apply Ferndale Nurseries, Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green. (*Looking round.*) But I thought supper was ready. (*He puts tomatoes in salad bowl on sideboard L.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. No. I called you in, George, because we just wanted to have a word with you while we're by ourselves. (*She sits in chair R. of table.*)

RADFERN. Oh—I see. (*He sits on chair L. of table.*) Well?

(*A pause.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*impatiently*). Go on, Bernard.

BAXLEY. It's like this, old man.

RADFERN. Just a minute . . . (*He picks up banana-skin from table, goes up stage and throws it into waste-paper basket by desk up R. He then returns and sits L. of table again.*) . . . You were saying?

BAXLEY. I've just seen this chap Simpson I mentioned to you the other day. Only time I could see him, because he's out of London all the week. I think I told you the other day—it's a marvellous opportunity. (*He sits on pouf.*)

RADFERN. Doesn't sound like one to me. When there isn't much business, I don't see that you're going to sell a lot of business supplies.

BAXLEY. You are with these things. I've worked all that out, old man. Trust me. But the point is this, they say I can have that agency—exclusive agency—if I put down four hundred and fifty pounds.

RADFERN. Put it down?

BAXLEY. Just put it down, that's all, old man. These people don't need the money, but their agent has to put down four hundred and fifty pounds.

RADFERN. But you haven't got four hundred and fifty pounds, have you, Bernard?

BAXLEY. Of course I haven't. I haven't been as lucky as you have, old man.

RADFERN. How do you know I've been lucky?

MRS. BAXLEY. He doesn't know. That's only his silly way of talking, George. We all know you've worked hard for your money.

BAXLEY. Certainly. I never suggested you hadn't. And I know you've lent me a bit already, George.

RADFERN (*good-humouredly*). About two hundred and fifty pounds, I think, Bernard.

BAXLEY. Which you'll get back, of course.

MRS. BAXLEY. Of course.

(*Pause. RADFERN rises and steps L.C., BAXLEY rises to face him.*)

RADFERN comes to below table and BAXLEY follows to L. of him.)

BAXLEY. But what we feel is that if you'd simply let me have this four hundred and fifty to put down—

MRS. BAXLEY. You see, it's a wonderful chance for Bernard.

BAXLEY. And I thought I'd come straight to you instead of going to Dorothy, even if she is Lucy's sister.

RADFERN. Quite right. (*He is by now sitting on downstage edge of table.*) We can keep Dorothy out of this. As a matter of fact, she doesn't know you owe me two hundred and fifty already.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). And she's not the only one.

BAXLEY. Well, I don't like dragging women into these things. And I know George doesn't. Well, what about it, old man?

RADFERN (*musingly*). Four hundred and fifty. (*He rises and goes towards greenhouse, up R.*) You know, it's quite a bit of money, Bernard. I'll have to think about it.

BAXLEY. There isn't much time, and I don't want to lose the chance.

RADFERN. I quite understand that, old man, but four hundred and fifty on top of the two hundred and fifty you've had already is quite a lot of money— (*Suddenly turning.*) Look here—

(BAXLEY turns up L.C.)

—ask me again after supper, and I'll give you an answer.

(*He goes out into greenhouse. BAXLEY and MRS. BAXLEY watch him go, then look at each other, raising their eyebrows.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. What do you think? (*She rises and crosses above table to R. of BAXLEY.*)

BAXLEY. That'll be all right. (*Taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it.*) After supper, over a drink or two, I'll be able to touch him.

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, but what about this chap of Elsie's?

BAXLEY. He'll have gone then.

MRS. BAXLEY. Listen, if they want to be alone with him *before* supper, it's better for us than if they wait.

BAXLEY. That's right. Leave 'em to it, then. After all, I got in first. (*He goes to armchair L. and sits. Through the following scene he plays Patience with the cards on the small table.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. This sounds like them.

(*Voices and noise of front door shutting are heard outside R. Enter ELSIE, through door R., looking very bright. She is followed by HAROLD RUSS, not bad-looking and smartly dressed, but with nothing in him. In twenty years' time he will look and behave exactly like BAXLEY.*)

ELSIE (*happy and excited, coming to R.C. above door*). Harold, this is my Aunt Lucy and my Uncle Bernard.

(*HAROLD, who is at door, crosses below table to L.O. to meet LUCY: he is smoking a cigarette.*)

But you've all met before, haven't you?

MRS. BAXLEY (*smiling very falsely*). Yes. Last Tuesday, I think it was. (*She shakes hands with HAROLD, then sits on pouf.*) What a lovely day it's been, hasn't it?

HAROLD. Yes, hasn't it? I've seen a lot of it too. Been taking a fellow round in a car, trying to sell it to him.

(*ELSIE goes down and shuts door which HAROLD left open.*)

BAXLEY. Any luck?

HAROLD. Shouldn't be surprised.

BAXLEY. How is business?

HAROLD. Not too good. How are things with you?

BAXLEY. Well, just now—I'm—er—looking round.

HAROLD. Oh—yes. I remember you telling me, the other night. Been out East, haven't you?

BAXLEY. That's right. Malay States. Singapore chiefly. Wish I'd never come back. It's a man's life out there—even yet, a man's life. Isn't it, Lucy?

MRS. BAXLEY (*tartly*). I don't know about a man's life. I know it isn't a woman's life.

BAXLEY. She wanted to get back, you see. And I thought I'd give the Old Country another chance. (*He shuffles the cards.*)

ELSIE (*sitting in armchair R.*). I'd love to travel. So would you, wouldn't you, Harold?

HAROLD. Wouldn't mind. (*Turning up R. of table.*) I knock up and down a bit, you know.

BAXLEY. And now you're going to pop the question to Dad, eh?

HAROLD. Hello, who's been telling you? (*He sits on chair R. of table.*)

BAXLEY. Never mind, but we know. (*To Mrs. BAXLEY.*) Don't we?

MRS. BAXLEY (*with ferocious parody of him*). Yes, we know.

BAXLEY. And if you two want us to leave you to it, just say the word.

ELsie. All right. Thanks. But I think we'll wait a bit.

MRS. BAXLEY (*with dignity*). If a proper opportunity presents itself—

(RADFERN enters from greenhouse R., carrying another tomato.)

HAROLD. Good evening, Mr. Radfern.

RADFERN. Oh—good evening. (*As he passes him—he then goes below table over L. to show it to BAXLEY, afterwards putting it with the others on sideboard.*) And there's another one (*indicating tomatoes*), making three. Do for supper.

ELsie (*to Mrs. BAXLEY*). You see, Auntie. That's the surprise in the fortune. What did I tell you? Dad and his three tomatoes.

RADFERN (*pointing to cards on table*). Oh—you've been telling fortunes again, have you? (*He is now between the pouf and table, filling his pipe.*) Don't you know it's unlucky to read the cards on Sunday?

MRS. BAXLEY. That's just superstition.

RADFERN. Of course it is. But then it's all superstition, isn't it? and you might as well be thoroughly superstitious while you're at it. Well, what do the cards say to-night?

MRS. BAXLEY. A great surprise for Elsie. And she's going on a long journey quite soon.

HAROLD. Oh?

ELsie (*smiling at him*). Well, I wouldn't mind.

RADFERN (*crossing towards ELsie and to above armchair R.O.*). Anywhere but Laburnum Grove and Shooters Green, eh?

ELsie. No, not anywhere. But somewhere exciting.

BAXLEY. I know what you want. You go—

RADFERN (*turning and chiming in hastily*). Out East. And I said it first, Bernard.

ELsie. Everybody's so smug and settled down and dull here, and so pleased with themselves.

RADFERN. Well, why shouldn't they be pleased with themselves? They've got nice peaceful homes—

ELsie (*bitterly*). Yes, and greenhouses and wireless sets.

RADFERN (*good-humouredly*). Well, what do you want us to have—elephants and tigers and a scenic railway?

ELsie. Yes—but it's all so—so—

HAROLD (*loftily*). Suburban.

ELsie. Yes—suburban.

RADFERN. That's all right to me. When your mother and I came here, we thought we'd got somewhere. That's why we were so pleased with ourselves and ready to live a nice quiet life.

BAXLEY. That's all right for you, George. You've always led that sort of life. But give me—adventure.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). Oh—and since when?

HAROLD. I know what he means. I'm just the same.

ELSIE. I am too.

RADFERN. Well, I'm not. You know, you don't get this sort of life handed to you on a plate.

ELSIE. What do you mean, Dad?

RADFERN. I mean this. Though *you* get all this handed to you on a plate—given, free, gratis, and for nothing—I don't. And (*pointing outside*) *he* doesn't and *he* doesn't.

BAXLEY (*staring fatuously*). Who doesn't?

ELSIE. I don't see what you're driving at.

RADFERN. Now listen. (*He comes c. below table.*) Here's Shooters Green, one of North London's newest suburbs. Very clean, very respectable, bright as a new pin. Nice little shops in the High Street. *Yes, Madam, shall I send it? Certainly, Madam.* Tea rooms. Picture palaces. *Good morning, Mrs. Robinson. Good evening, Mr. Johnson.* (*He turns his back to audience, indicating Laburnum Grove, through the window.*) And here's Laburnum Grove, one of its best roads, very quiet, very select, best type of semi-detached villas. "Ben Machree." "Craig Y Don." "Mon Repos." All nations, you see. "Heather Brow"—though there isn't any heather for miles around. (*Turning front again.*) And us—"Ferndale." Nice little houses. Nice people. Quiet, respectable. No scandals. No brokers' men. No screams in the night. Morris Oxfords, little greenhouses, wireless sets.

ELSIE (*rather bitterly*). That's it. You know it all right, Dad.

HAROLD. Gosh—yes!

RADFERN (*good-humouredly*). Yes, I know it. But you don't. You're like somebody who thinks that buns grow on trees. You don't know the world. Because all this has been handed to you on a plate, you think it's been handed to everybody else—

BAXLEY. Well, hasn't it?

RADFERN. No. (*He has moved to below l. of table.*) There are chaps who've sweated their guts out so they could settle down here. And God knows what they've risked—some of 'em. You don't know where they've been or what they've done.

BAXLEY (*with suggestion of contempt*). Well, George, I hope nobody shoots you to-morrow morning on your way to the City. I haven't noticed you running many risks.

RADFERN. Oh—me. Well, of course I'm different. (*He goes up and sits on chair l. of table.*)

BAXLEY. You've been lucky.

MRS. BAXLEY. I'm sure George has always worked hard, even if he has been safe and comfortable in his own business.

ELSIE (*rising and going up l.c. a little, trying to attract Lucy's attention*). Er—

RADFERN (*seeing ELSIE signalling*). Lucy, you're wanted.

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes. Come on, Bernard.

(*She rises, crosses R. and exits through door R.*)

BAXLEY. What for? (*Realizing at last from ELSIE's dumb-show.*) Oh—yes. Certainly.

(*He rises, starts humming the "Wedding March," chucks ELSIE under the chin as he passes her crossing to R. and exits door R. As he gets to the door he turns and makes "thumbs up" gesture.*)

RADFERN (*staring after them*). What's the matter with those two?

(*HAROLD rises.*)

ELSIE. They're leaving us alone because they know we want to talk to you.

RADFERN. I see.

HAROLD (*pushing his chair under table*). It's like this, Mr. Radfern—Elsie and I—

ELSIE (*going to HAROLD's R. and taking his right arm*). Dad, we're engaged.

HAROLD. Well, we want to be.

RADFERN. I see. (*To ELSIE.*) Have you told your mother yet?

ELSIE. No, I'll tell her when she comes in, after supper.

HAROLD. Naturally I wanted to talk to you about it.

RADFERN. Quite so.

HAROLD. We'd like to get married very soon.

RADFERN. What on?

HAROLD. Well, that's the point. Of course I'd like to get a bit more settled first.

RADFERN. Let me see, aren't you helping a friend of yours to sell second-hand cars just now?

HAROLD (*loftily*). Yes. Of course that's just while I'm looking round.

RADFERN. Ah—you're looking round, are you? Like your Uncle Bernard, Elsie. He's great on looking round.

ELSIE (*impatiently*). Oh, Harold, why don't you talk to him properly. (*She crosses behind HAROLD and above table to RADFERN and leans over table on his R.*) The point is, Dad, we're engaged—and Harold knows of a second-hand car business he could buy if he only had some capital—

RADFERN. Not four hundred and fifty pounds, by any chance, is it?

HAROLD (*sitting R. of table, enthusiastically producing pocket-book*). Well, it could be more and it could be a bit less. I can give you the figures.

RADFERN (*stopping him*). Not just now. I asked if it was four

hundred and fifty pounds because that seems to be the popular amount to-night.

(Front door bell rings loudly.)

ELSIE. Oh—bother! Who can that be?

RADFERN. Probably Joe Fletten. I expected him to look in this evening.

ELSIE *(petulantly)*. Why does he want to come here at this time? He'll be coming in the middle of the night to ask about his greenhouse soon.

RADFERN. I shouldn't be surprised. Well, just let him in.

(ELSIE goes above table and out at door R.)

It looks as if we'll have to postpone this little talk.

HAROLD *(rising)*. That's all right. *(He pushes his chair under table.)* We could talk it over after supper perhaps.

RADFERN. Yes, perhaps we could. But it seems to me I'm going to be rather busy after supper to-night. By the way, you've never thought of becoming an agent for business supplies, have you?

HAROLD. Not my line. But I do know a car when I see one. And there's a business there just waiting to be picked up—

RADFERN. If only you can put some money down. Just put it down, eh?

HAROLD. That's all it amounts to. You see—

RADFERN *(stopping him)*. After supper.

(Enter ELSIE R., followed by JOE FLETTEN, a rather loud, jovial, middle-aged man, somewhat lower in the social scale than anybody we have met here so far. He carries his hat. ELSIE goes behind HAROLD to above table.)

FLETTEN *(R.C.)*. Good evening, Mr. Radfern.

RADFERN *(rising and coming below table)*. Good evening, Joe. Thought you might be looking in.

(ELSIE gives to L. as RADFERN goes below table.)

FLETTEN *(to HAROLD)*. Good evening. Seen you before here, haven't I?

HAROLD *(rather sulkily)*. I believe so. Good evening. *(He joins ELSIE above the table, taking a cigarette from his case.)*

FLETTEN *(going to RADFERN below table)*. Sorry to be so late, Mr. Radfern. But that greenhouse of mine's giving me a lot of trouble, and I just wanted a tip or two about—

RADFERN *(hastily)*. About your tomato plants. Come on then, I'll show you how I manage them. *(He crosses FLETTEN and goes off R. into greenhouse.)*

(ELSIE goes down and sits on upstage arm of armchair L.)

FLETTEN (*as he follows*). Shan't keep you a minute. (*Jovially to ELSIE and HAROLD.*) This greenhouse business is a terrible hobby, I give you my word. Keeps you busy all the time, all the time. (*He follows RADFERN out into greenhouse.*)

HAROLD (*softly, grumbling*). I hope that chap's not going to stay for hours. (*He goes down towards ELSIE, L.C.*)

ELSIE (*going over to him*). No, he won't stay long. But he's an awful old nuisance, though. Comes here two or three times a week now, to look at Dad's greenhouse. (*She rises and goes to him.*) Oh—Harold—I hope it'll be all right.

HAROLD. Well, it ought to be. Only—I don't think your father likes me much.

ELSIE. He will when he gets to know you better. He's just a bit stupid, that's all.

HAROLD. And I don't know that I'm very keen on *him*.

ELSIE. Oh—Dad's all right when you know him. He's dull, but he's rather nice, and he'll always do anything for me. It's Mother I'm frightened of. Dad's easy.

(*The hall door R. opens and MRS. BAXLEY peeps into the room.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Oh—all alone?

ELSIE (*not too pleased, going to card table*). Yes, you can come in.

(*MRS. BAXLEY comes in, leaving the door open behind her.*)

Mr. Fletten called and Dad's gone back into the greenhouse with him. (*She sits on pouf.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*crossing above table to R. of HAROLD, up L.C.*). Can't imagine what your dad sees in that man. Common, I call him.

HAROLD. Yes, looks like a bookie's clerk.

MRS. BAXLEY (*with dignity*). I've never seen a bookie's clerk.

(*BAXLEY looks in at door, R.*)

All right, Bernard, you needn't stand there looking silly. You can come in.

(*He comes in again humming the "Wedding March."*)

I wonder if we could get ready for supper now.

BAXLEY. That's a good idea! (*He sits in armchair R.*)

(*HAROLD goes down and sits in armchair L. and puts his feet up on card-table.*)

ELSIE (*jumping up*). Yes, why not?

MRS. BAXLEY. I was only thinking that if supper was here, all ready, your father might take it into his head to ask that Mr. Fletten to stay, and we don't want that, do we?

ELSIE. Good Lord, no!

HAROLD. No, don't let's have anybody else, if we can help it.

BAXLEY. Hear, hear!

ELSIE. But he won't stay, he never does. We can risk it.

MRS. BAXLEY. Come on then, Bernard. Don't just sit there.

BAXLEY. What's that? Oh, don't be funny!

(MRS. BAXLEY and ELSIE start to set the table for supper, bringing things from sideboard. ELSIE brings Tray "B"—see *Property Plot*—MRS. BAXLEY removes ashtrays to telephone table L. of window and brings pile of meat plates, bread plates and dish of ham and tongue. ELSIE sets mats and cutlery and stays at table. MRS. BAXLEY returns to sideboard for salad-bowl and bread, and later for Tray "A," after she has set the breadplates.)

MRS. BAXLEY. Why your dad won't have a servant in the house, I can't imagine. He can well afford it.

BAXLEY. Two or three, I should think.

ELSIE. It's one of his little fads. Mother doesn't mind. She and the char. do it easily—with my help.

MRS. BAXLEY (*sarcastically*). I'm glad you said—with your help.

ELSIE. It's not my fault I'm kept at home, pretending to help Mother, instead of going out to work. I'd much rather go out to work.

BAXLEY. They're coming in.

(Enter FLETTEN and RADFERN from greenhouse. The supper-table is being laid for five people. The meal consists of slices of ham and tongue, stewed fruit and custard, bread and butter. During this period of the action, the light can be going rapidly.)

FLETTEN (*jovially, going towards table*). Well, well, the feast is spread.

RADFERN (*R. of him*). Have a bite with us, Joe?

FLETTEN (*moving towards door R.*). No, thank you, Mr. Radfern. Must be getting along. I'll look in to-morrow night, then.

RADFERN (*following him to above door R.*). Do. Any time after eight.

FLETTEN (*turning as he reaches door and coming back towards table, to MRS. BAXLEY*). Nice weather we're having, isn't it? I should think it is. (*Going to door R. again and turning.*) Good night, all. Good night.

(The others murmur good night. RADFERN follows him out R.)

MRS. BAXLEY (*softly but with energy*). He made me jump—with his nice weather! Common, I call him.

BAXLEY (*quoting*). "The feast is spread." (*He rises and crosses below table to sideboard.*) That's a way to talk. Anyone would think he had never seen anybody laying a supper-table before.

MRS. BAXLEY. Perhaps he hasn't.

BAXLEY (*returning to below and R. of table with jug of beer*). Never seen the world, that's his trouble. (*He fills his glass.*)

ELSIE. Oh, he's just one of Dad's silly old men. If it wasn't for the greenhouse he wouldn't come here.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, if he's what you get when you keep green-houses I'm glad I don't keep one.

ELSIE (*going down to above pouf—to HAROLD, softly*). Harold—remember. You must get Dad's answer to-night.

HAROLD. Yes, I know, I know. (*He is still sitting in arm-chair L.*)

(*ELSIE returns to her work and replaces tray on sideboard.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*coming to just above BAXLEY, R. of table*). And Bernard, don't forget—after supper.

BAXLEY. Leave it to me.

(*RADFERN returns through door R., and switches on lights at door. It is essential that the supper-table should be brilliantly lit.*)

RADFERN (*heartily*). Let's have some light on the subject. And plenty of it.

(*MRS. BAXLEY goes up and draws curtains over window. ELSIE goes above table to fetch chair from desk up R. for HAROLD. RADFERN goes to above table and picks up salad-bowl and shows tomatoes to BAXLEY and then to MRS. BAXLEY. BAXLEY gets chair from R. of window for MRS. BAXLEY.*)

Supper ready? Good! Look at those tomatoes. Home grown on the premises. They absolutely light up the table.

MRS. BAXLEY. If that's how you can go on about three tomatoes, I'm glad you don't grow pineapples. I don't know what would happen then.

RADFERN (*looks at supper-table*). Ham, tongue, salad. Beer. Everything in its place and just what I wanted. Let's get started. Come on, everybody.

(*They seat themselves in this order: RADFERN full facing the audience, ELSIE on L. side of him, MRS. BAXLEY on R.; then HAROLD below ELSIE, and BAXLEY below MRS. BAXLEY. RADFERN helps them to meat, and they help themselves to salad, making a few conventional remarks in the bustle. During this ELSIE helps them to bread. HAROLD asks BAXLEY to pass the beer. ELSIE then asks her father if he'll take beer, and helps him. RADFERN asks BAXLEY how his appetite is, adding, "Sorry we've got no chutney for you, Bernard!—but those tomatoes are very good." BAXLEY replies, "Yes. I'll try one of your home-grown." As he helps himself he says, "I think this looks the ripest," to which RADFERN replies, "Well, have the best one, whatever you do." When the dialogue begins, they are all quietly attentive.*)

BAXLEY. This ham looks good, George.

RADFERN (*heartily*). I expect it is good, Bernard. You know, I don't think there's a meal in the week I enjoy more than Sunday night supper, and I couldn't tell you why. Unless it's because it's all so nice and peaceful.

ELSIE (*with a touch of contempt*). You're all for it being nice and peaceful, aren't you, Dad?

RADFERN (*with mock humility*). I'm afraid I am. I'm not like you folks.

MRS. BAXLEY. Don't count me with them. I don't want any adventures. I want to see a regular income arriving. (*She looks at BAXLEY.*)

HAROLD. We'd all like that.

RADFERN (*faintly sardonic*). Yes, I believe you would. But it's not so easy these days.

BAXLEY (*with loud complacency*). It's not so easy if you're straight. That's the point. I like money as much as the next man, but it's got to be clean money. (*He looks at HAROLD.*)

HAROLD (*in the same strain*). Of course. I'm just the same. Won't touch it if it isn't straight.

MRS. BAXLEY. Good gracious! I should think not.

BAXLEY. I've had chances of the other kind—packets of it——

RADFERN (*ironically*). No, Bernard, have you really?

BAXLEY. I have, George. But I've always turned it down. Tainted money. Wouldn't touch it.

HAROLD. Wouldn't touch it with a barge pole. I've had my chances too—you get them in our business—but I'm the same as you—wouldn't look at queer money.

ELSIE. And I hope you never will, Harold.

HAROLD. Of course I shan't.

BAXLEY (*sententiously*). It's the only thing to do, whatever happens—keep straight.

RADFERN. Well, I'm glad to hear you fellows feel like that. I used to feel like it myself in the old days.

ELSIE. What do you mean, Dad—in the old days?

RADFERN. I mean, in the days when I used to be in the wholesale paper trade.

BAXLEY. But you're still in the wholesale paper trade.

RADFERN. How do you know I am?

BAXLEY. I've always understood you were.

RADFERN. Well, I'm not. Haven't been in it for several years.

BAXLEY. But the firm's there and the office——?

RADFERN. Oh, I keep them going, but that's just a blind. Pass the mustard, will you, Elsie.

ELSIE. But I never knew you'd changed your business.

RADFERN. No? I don't think this ham's as nice as the last. I must tell your mother about it, Elsie.

ELSIE. But listen, Dad—does Mother know you're not in the paper business any more?

RADFERN. No, she doesn't. And I don't want a word of any of this repeated to her. She's a bit old-fashioned in some ways and it might give her a shock. You can ask me any questions you like, and I'll answer 'em truthfully. But not a word to her. If you can't promise that, we'll change the subject.

HAROLD } (together). I promise.
ELSIE }

MRS. BAXLEY. So do I.

BAXLEY. All right to me.

RADFERN. Honest to God?

(*They murmur agreement.*)

That's settled then. Not a word to her. Now what is it you'd like to know?

ELSIE. Dad, when did you leave your old business?

RADFERN. Do you remember that about four or five years ago we were very hard up?

ELSIE. Was it the year when we didn't go away for the holidays?

RADFERN. It was. We were on enough rocks without going to the seaside. We might easily have been sold up. Well, that was when I finished with the wholesale paper trade.

HAROLD. What happened?

RADFERN. Oh, I'd struggled with the business ever since I came back from the war. Slaved at it. Then the slump came. More slavery. But we had a good little connection in the fine quality trade. And somebody wanted that, a big firm. They made me an offer. I didn't like it or the chap who made it. I turned it down, so this big firm did me in—never mind how—but they did. They won all right. Clever chap that, he's been knighted since—the dirty swine.

BAXLEY. And then—what?

RADFERN. Well, having given honesty a fair chance, I thought I'd try the other thing.

MRS. BAXLEY. The *other thing*?

RADFERN. Yes.

MRS. BAXLEY. You don't mean—dishonesty?

RADFERN. I do.

BAXLEY. You're pulling our legs.

RADFERN. Certainly not.

MRS. BAXLEY. Then are you going to tell me you're deliberately dishonest?

RADFERN. That's what I am telling you.

ELSIE. But Dad, it's ridiculous. You're talking as if you were a crook.

RADFERN (*nonchalantly*). Well, I am a crook.

MRS. BAXLEY. A crook!

RADFERN. Yes, a crook. A criminal. An enemy of society.

(They all stare at him open-mouthed. ELSIE recovers first.)

ELSIE. Dad, you're being funny.

BAXLEY. Course he is. That'll do now, George. We've bought it. We've bought it.

RADFERN *(with quiet earnestness)*. I'm perfectly serious, Bernard. This isn't a joke. Have a little more salad, Elsie?

ELSIE *(staring at him, faltering)*. No thanks, Dad. I—don't feel very hungry.

RADFERN. Now come along, none of that. Never let anything put you off your food—that's one of my mottoes. What do you say, Harold?

HAROLD *(dazed)*. Yes—Mr. Radfern—I should think—that's a good idea.

MRS. BAXLEY *(solemnly)*. George Radfern, you don't look like a crook to me.

RADFERN. Yes, but you can't judge by appearances. Why do you think Joe Fletten comes here?

MRS. BAXLEY. You mean that man who comes to talk to you about greenhouses?

RADFERN. You must be innocent if you think that Joe Fletten knows anything about greenhouses. You've only got to look at him to see he's no gardener.

MRS. BAXLEY. I suppose he's a crook too?

RADFERN. Of course he is. Very old hand, Joe. He works under me in the same organization. *(To Mrs. BAXLEY.)* Have a little more tongue? *(He puts a slice on her plate.)*

MRS. BAXLEY *(faintly)*. I can't eat what I've got.

ELSIE. Dad, do you really mean all this?

RADFERN. Of course I mean it. Every penny that's come into this house for the last few years has been dishonestly earned.

BAXLEY *(pushing his chair back and throwing his napkin on to the table)*. My God!

RADFERN *(coolly)*. Tainted money. You've eaten it and drunk it and it's clothed you and housed you and taken you to the pictures and sent you to the seaside. If I'd gone on trying to make an honest living, I don't know where you'd have been now, Elsie. As it is, look at us. So nicely off that Harold here—and your Uncle Bernard here—are both hoping I'll lend them several hundred pounds each, on very doubtful security.

HAROLD *(also pushing his chair back)*. Here, I say—

ELSIE. But Dad, what do you do?

MRS. BAXLEY. Do you *burgle* places?

RADFERN. Burgle places! Certainly not. Do I look as if I burgled places?

MRS. BAXLEY. No, you don't. But then you don't look like a crook at all to me.

ELSIE (*appealingly*). You're not. Are you, Dad?

RADFERN. I've told you—I am. And one slip—just one slip, that's all—and I'd be for it.

MRS. BAXLEY (*awed*). Prison?

RADFERN. Yes—

(MRS. BAXLEY seizes her glass of water and drinks.)

—and a good long spell of it too.

ELSIE (*looking at him in awe and terror*). Dad!

BAXLEY. But look here, George, what do you do?

RADFERN. Well, you might describe it as a private policy of inflation.

ELSIE. I don't know what that means.

MRS. BAXLEY. Neither do I.

ELSIE. Do you, Harold?

RADFERN. I'm ready for a little of that stewed fruit now, Elsie. Let's put these plates on the side. (*Makes a move.*)

ELSIE (*hastily*). No, let me do it, Dad.

(ELSIE rises and helps to pass dirty plates to HAROLD, who piles them in front of him, except last one, which he puts on downstage end of table for RADFERN—property required at Curtain. ELSIE then goes to sideboard and brings stewed fruit and plates, which she puts in her place, serving one portion, which she hands to RADFERN. All the others decline.)

MRS. BAXLEY. Stewed fruit!

RADFERN. That's it, stewed fruit. What about it?

MRS. BAXLEY. This is no time for stewed fruit.

RADFERN. Yes, of course it is. When do you want it?

BAXLEY. She doesn't mean that, old man. As a matter of fact, she's very fond of stewed fruit.

RADFERN. Good, and mind you, this is real garden rhubarb.

MRS. BAXLEY. I don't want garden rhubarb—I want the truth.

RADFERN. All right, Lucy, you shall have the truth and garden rhubarb and custard too, if you like it.

(He offers MRS. BAXLEY his own plate of stewed fruit, which ELSIE passed to him. MRS. BAXLEY refuses it, so he takes it himself.)

MRS. BAXLEY. Custard!

BAXLEY. But what about this inflation business?

RADFERN. Ah, that. Well, a lot of people think this depression in trade is chiefly due to the fact that there isn't enough money in circulation. Like playing a game with counters and finding you haven't got enough counters to go round. Our organization—my associates and myself—have been quietly busy these last few years trying to remedy this unhappy state of things. It started in America

—forging and counterfeiting bonds and notes—and then developed here, but just lately the American end has been doing badly, almost stopped. But we're doing quite nicely here, and sometimes I think that things in England would have been worse if it hadn't been for us. In fact, you might say we've been doing our bit.

BAXLEY (*dazed*). Forging and counterfeiting bonds and notes!

HAROLD (*awed*). My hat!

RADFERN (*blandly*). Very interesting work. It begins as an art and ends as a profitable business.

ELSIE. But is it—serious?

HAROLD. Is it *serious*!

RADFERN. One of the most serious crimes in the calendar, Elsie. You see, the banks don't like it, and what the banks don't like must be a serious crime nowadays, like blasphemy in the Middle Ages.

ELSIE. And you're mixed up in it?

RADFERN. I'm engaged in it, not mixed up in it. I was able to join the organization at first because I happened to have a supply of the right sort of paper. Since then I've been on the staff. My job now is distribution. That's what takes me away, of course. I'm off to Birmingham early to-morrow morning.

MRS. BAXLEY. What, you're going to Birmingham on this crooked work?

RADFERN. Why not? If I can do it in London, I can do it in Birmingham. There's nothing peculiarly sacred about Birmingham, is there?

ELSIE. But are the police really after you?

BAXLEY. Don't be silly, Elsie. They must be. It's a terribly serious crime, forging bonds and counterfeiting notes.

RADFERN (*calmly*). I should think we've given Scotland Yard its biggest and most worrying case for years. After us! They're all after us. Detectives, police, bank officials, magistrates, judges, the Treasury, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force. We haven't even the League of Nations on our side.

BAXLEY. But I don't see how you've managed to go on so long without being found out.

RADFERN. Partly luck, partly good management. Of course, you can't really tell what's happening on the other side. They may have got the net out, and it may be closing in on us now.

(Telephone bell rings, very sharp and loud. They all rise except

RADFERN. HAROLD steps back to below sideboard.)

ELSIE (*with a little scream*). Oh—what's that?

RADFERN (*coolly*). That's the telephone. I'll answer it. (*He rises.*) Have you got a bit of cheese there for me? (*Goes to telephone.*)

(ELSIE goes to sideboard.)

Hello! No . . . I'm not . . . Well, I can't help it. You've got

the wrong number. (*Comes back from telephone.*) Wants to know if I'm the North London Dogs' Hospital.

(MR. and MRS. BAXLEY sit again. HAROLD comes back from below sideboard and sits.)

ELSIE (*bringing cheese from sideboard*). Oh—it gave me such a fright.

RADFERN. Well, I'm sorry, but after all you wanted a bit of excitement, didn't you? (*He pats her cheek.*)

(*They both sit again.*)

BAXLEY (*solemnly*). George, that might have been somebody who was after you, tracking you down.

HAROLD. Yes, it might.

RADFERN. And then again, it might not. If tracking people down consists of ringing them up and asking if they're the Dogs' Hospital, we could all be Sherlock Holmeses.

ELSIE (*eagerly*). And after all, I don't suppose they'd think of looking for crooks of any kind in a place like Shooters Green.

RADFERN. Oh—yes, they would. They haven't your ideas, Elsie. People who break the law have got to live somewhere, and why not in Shooters Green and Laburnum Grove? They took away that solicitor who used to live at "Stella Maris" and gave him a couple of years. That was a start. Probably there are one or two more of us in Laburnum Grove who'll have to go yet.

(HAROLD pushes his chair well back and rises.)

Hello, what's the matter?

HAROLD (*muttering*). I must be going.

ELSIE (*disappointed*). Harold?

HAROLD (*crossing below table to door R.*). I'm sorry, but I must be going.

RADFERN (*smoothly*). What about that little talk we were going to have? Another time, eh?

ELSIE (*moving round above table to L. of him*). But, Harold, you can't go like this.

HAROLD (*muttering*). I'm sorry, but it's getting late and I'm feeling very tired—

(ELSIE puts a hand on his arm.)

ELSIE. Oh—but Harold.

HAROLD (*releasing himself and suddenly raising his voice in a rather hysterical manner*). Leave me alone. I tell you I've got to go. Good night.

(*He hurries out R. and as she follows him the front door slams off R.*)

MR. and MRS. BAXLEY are looking down. RADFERN smiles and wipes his mouth. Then ELSIE, looking tearful, opens the door and stands in the doorway.)

MRS. BAXLEY. Has he gone?

ELSIE (*tearfully*). Yes. And I'm going to bed. Good night.

RADFERN (*gravely*). Listen, Elsie—— (*He rises.*)

ELSIE (*shaking her head*). No, no more now. I can't, Dad. Good night.

(*She closes the door R. and vanishes. She can be heard running upstairs.*)

RADFERN (*looking after her, gravely*). Poor kid, I'm afraid she's got more than she bargained for. (*He sits again.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*tartly*). We've all got more than we bargained for, if you ask me. Even the great adventurer, Bernard here.

(*BAXLEY rises and goes round to the back of his chair.*)

BAXLEY (*dazed, staring at RADFERN*). Look here, George, for God's sake tell us the truth now.

RADFERN (*impressively*). I'm telling you the truth. I've not been in the wholesale paper trade for the last four years. All this (*waves his hand*) comes out of the proceeds of illegal and criminal actions. Tainted money, Bernard. And you've been enjoying it for some time, and I believe you'd like a good slice more of it, wouldn't you? Tainted money. Ill-gotten gains. And mind you're not an accessory.

BAXLEY (*frightened*). I'll see to that.

MRS. BAXLEY. This is upsetting my stomach. Why, every time I see a policeman now, I'll be frightened out of my life.

RADFERN. Oh—forget about it.

MRS. BAXLEY (*scornfully*). Forget about it!

(*There is a sharp ring at the front door bell.*)

What's that?

RADFERN (*coolly*). I can tell you what that is. That's Dorothy, and she's forgotten her front-door key again. Now don't forget. Not a word to her.

BAXLEY (*moving towards door R.*). Here, I'm off upstairs.

MRS. BAXLEY. So am I. I couldn't face her to-night. (*She rises and goes over to door R.*)

BAXLEY (*holding the door open for MRS. BAXLEY*). Let's get out of the way first.

(*MRS. BAXLEY goes off R. and BAXLEY follows her.*)

RADFERN. Go on then, hurry up. (*He smiles and finishes his beer, then goes towards and out of door R., lighting his pipe.*)

(*There is the sound of the front door opening and shutting, of voices, and RADFERN re-enters with MRS. RADFERN, a pleasant-looking woman in her early forties.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*going to B.C.*). Hello, where is everybody?

RADFERN (*following her in and going to R. of her*). I think Elsie had a bit of a tiff with that young man of hers, and went to bed early to have a little cry about it.

MRS. RADFERN. Do you think I ought to go up?

RADFERN. No, leave her alone. She'll be all right.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, where are Bernard and Lucy? (*She is taking off her gloves, then her coat, RADFERN helping her. She puts coat on armchair R.*)

RADFERN. They've just gone to bed.

MRS. RADFERN. They went early.

RADFERN (*very innocently*). Yes, I think they must have wanted to have a talk about something.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, I must say, Dad—though Lucy is my own sister—I wouldn't be heart-broken if they'd gone upstairs to talk about leaving us. And I know you wouldn't be.

RADFERN. No, I'd get over it. (*Going above table towards L.C. to begin putting supper things together.*) Here, I'll give you a hand with these. (*He starts collecting plates down L. side of table.*)

MRS. RADFERN. No, you sit down and smoke your pipe in peace, Dad. You've got to get up early in the morning to get yourself off, haven't you?

RADFERN. Yes. Early train to Birmingham.

MRS. RADFERN. Well then. (*She goes to R. of table to pick up ham and tongue dish, but stops to add affectionately.*) You know, Dad, I sometimes think you're a bit too quiet and easy-going, but—dear me!—Mrs. Repington's been letting drop one or two things about her husband—and I was thinking on the way back I ought to be thankful I've got a nice, honest, sleepy old thing like you.

(*MRS. RADFERN has worked to below table to pick up bread-plate with her other hand. RADFERN has worked down L. of table. They meet below it, plates in hand.*)

RADFERN. Ah—now you're talking! (*He turns towards side-board.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE 1

SCENE.—*Same as Act I.*

TIME.—*Early next morning.*

The room has that very early morning look about it. The door to the kitchen is open and ELSIE is discovered at the kitchen cabinet. She comes through and crosses over to door R. and goes out. There is the noise of bolt and lock, opening and shutting of front door, then ELSIE comes in again R., with bottle of milk, which she takes to kitchen and is seen filling milk jug on tray. She then brings tray in to top of table. As she does this BAXLEY enters from door R. He is wearing an old dressing gown and looks dishevelled and still sleepy.

BAXLEY (R.C., yawning). Morning.

ELSIE (up L.C.). Morning, Uncle.

BAXLEY. Thought I heard somebody moving about down here.

ELSIE. It must have been me. *(She shuts kitchen door.)*

BAXLEY. Of course it was you. But you're usually the last downstairs and not the first. What made you get up so early?

ELSIE. I couldn't sleep. And why are you up, Uncle?

BAXLEY. Well, I couldn't sleep either. And I suddenly remembered your dad was going to Birmingham early this morning.

ELSIE. I know. I thought I'd get up and make his breakfast.

BAXLEY. That's a new idea, isn't it?

ELSIE. Yes. *(She kneels on chair L. of table.)* But the woman we have is away—ill. So I thought I'd get up and do it.

BAXLEY. Quite right, quite right. *(He sits on chair R. of table.)* But, you know, if he were out East, a man like your dad could have twenty servants—thirty servants. Waited on hand and foot.

ELSIE. I know.

BAXLEY. Hand and foot.

ELSIE. He could be here, if he wanted to.

BAXLEY. I dare say, but you see now why he won't have a servant living in the house, don't you? You see?

ELSIE. Yes.

BAXLEY. He's too clever for that, much too clever. *(Seeing RADFERN'S boots by armchair R.)* Those his boots?

ELSIE. Yes.

BAXLEY (*rising, picking up the boots reverently*). They could do with a bit of a rub.

ELSIE. I was going to do them.

BAXLEY. No, no, I'll do them. Get me the polishing outfit, will you, Elsie.

(*ELSIE exits to kitchen. BAXLEY crosses slowly below table to armchair L., stopping to flick a speck of dust off the boots. He sits down with boots, yawning, while ELSIE brings him the polishing outfit.*)

Thanks. Now I'll make a good job of these. It'll amuse your dad. What are you giving him for breakfast?

ELSIE. Boiled eggs. They're easiest. (*She goes to chair above table.*)

BAXLEY. How does he like his eggs boiled?

ELSIE. I can't remember.

(*BAXLEY drops the boots, rises, steps over the boots and cleaning things and goes up to L. of ELSIE.*)

BAXLEY (*reproachfully*). You can't remember how your own dad likes his eggs boiled?

ELSIE. Do you remember how *your* dad liked his eggs boiled?

BAXLEY. Don't be silly, Elsie, that's quite different. You're a girl. (*He turns and takes banana from sideboard.*) And, besides, it's such a long time since I lived with my old governor.

ELSIE. What did your dad do, Uncle?

BAXLEY (*going down and sitting in armchair L., eating banana*). He used to travel the North Midlands—from Wolverhampton to Stockport—for the Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Company, selling hymn-books and Sunday-school prizes. He had to look religious all the time, so he always dressed in black, and he wore a chin beard, like a Mormon. And he didn't smoke, and he didn't drink, so he used to eat a lot of cough candy. Bags of it. Absolutely stank of cough candy. I can smell it now. (*He sniffs.*) A sort of mixture of treacle and fire-lighters.

ELSIE (*kneeling beside him on pouf*). Was he nice?

(*Pause—whilst BAXLEY swallows some banana.*)

BAXLEY. No—he was hellishly dull.

ELSIE (*plaintively*). I thought my dad was dull. And I wish he was now.

BAXLEY. Well, he isn't.

ELSIE. I know. Uncle, do you think it's really true—what Dad told us last night?

BAXLEY. Yes. Must be.

ELSIE. But Dad! Just think of it!

BAXLEY (*irritably, looking for somewhere to drop his banana skin*). It's no good telling me to think of it, Elsie.

(*He eventually waves the banana skin in front of ELsie: she takes it and goes up and drops it in waste-paper basket by desk up R.*)

I've been thinking about it—and talking about it—half the night.

ELsie (*coming to above table*). I've hardly slept a wink.

BAXLEY. I'm not surprised.

ELsie (*to chair L. of table*). I got so frightened in the middle of the night.

BAXLEY. Well, if you ask me, you've got something to be frightened about. (*He is cleaning boots again now.*)

ELsie (*in tense whisper*). Listen, Uncle—(*coming back to pouf*) if they caught him, would he really be sent to prison?

BAXLEY. I should think he would. He'd get years and years. Penal servitude.

ELsie. But he's never done anything before.

BAXLEY. What's that matter if he's been doing this all the time. This is a big job. They'd drop on him like a ton of bricks.

ELsie (*awed*). Would they?

BAXLEY (*with gloomy pride*). Go for him tooth and nail. Yes, tooth and nail. Like a ton of bricks. Penal servitude for years and years—(*polishing vigorously*) and years.

ELsie. But, Uncle—it's awful.

BAXLEY. Well, speaking as a man of the world who's *seen* the world—I call that a well-polished boot! It's pretty serious—pretty serious.

ELsie. And they've only got to catch him.

BAXLEY. Just got to lay their hands on him, once, that's all.

(*The door R. opens. ELsie starts. Mrs. BAXLEY comes in.*)

ELsie. Oh—Auntie—you made me jump.

(*Mrs. BAXLEY is half dressed and looking very worn. She leaves door open and goes to below table. ELsie rises and goes up L.C.*)

Mrs. BAXLEY. I dare say. Anything's enough to make anybody jump, in this house. What are you up so early for?

ELsie. I'm getting Dad's breakfast ready.

(*She exits to kitchen.*)

Mrs. BAXLEY. Well, I thought I'd just come down to see if I could do anything for him. And what are you doing, Bernard? (*She goes towards him.*)

BAXLEY (*very off-handedly*). Oh—just giving George's boots a bit of a rub.

Mrs. BAXLEY. Be careful—or you might be cleaning my boots next. (*She turns up and sits L. of table.*)

(*ELsie re-enters and goes to above table with toast.*)

Is the tea made yet, because I must say I could do with a cup? What a night!

BAXLEY (*irritably*). We know, we know.

MRS. BAXLEY. She doesn't know, does she? (*To ELsie.*) I haven't had such a night for years. Talked and talked about it all, then thought and thought about it all, and then when I did get a bit of sleep, I had to dream about policemen, hundreds of policemen.

ELSIE (*distressed*). Oh—don't.

BAXLEY. No. What do you want to start that for, first thing in the morning?

(*There is a pause, during which Mrs. BAXLEY rises and very deliberately brings her chair down a little, turning it to face BAXLEY, and sits.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Start what?

BAXLEY. Talking about policemen.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, they still exist, don't they? And I know I shan't be able to look a policeman in the face.

BAXLEY. Well, why do you want to look a policeman in the face?

MRS. BAXLEY. Oh—don't you begin again. You said enough last night.

BAXLEY. Yes, when I could get a word in edgeways.

(*ELSIE goes to door R. and shuts it.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. It was two o'clock when I asked you to stop talking.

BAXLEY. Yes, and it was half-past two when you began again.

ELSIE (*coming to below table*). Now listen—you're not to tell anybody.

BAXLEY. Not likely!

MRS. BAXLEY (*indignantly*). As if we should! It's bad enough knowing about it without telling anybody.

ELSIE. But not even Mother. Don't forget.

MRS. BAXLEY. You're not going to tell me that all this has been going on all this time and your mother doesn't know anything about it?

ELSIE (*half sitting on downstage R. edge of table*). I'm sure she doesn't know anything about it.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, I can't understand why. She's my own sister, and she never seemed to me to miss much. And if she doesn't know, she ought to. If your uncle here had been up to any queer game like that, I'd have known all about it.

(*BAXLEY has by now finished cleaning boots and lights a cigarette.*)

BAXLEY. You might—and then again you might not.

MRS. BAXLEY. What's that?

BAXLEY. I said you might—and (*with exaggerated emphasis*) then—again—you—might—not.

MRS. BAXLEY. Oh—and what's your funny game been then?

BAXLEY. I didn't say there'd been any funny game. I only said—if there had been, you might know—and then again——

MRS. BAXLEY. I might not. I heard you. Well, there isn't any might about it. I'd have known. And I don't see how George has kept it from Dorothy all this time.

BAXLEY (*with gloomy pride*). Ah—that's where he's been so clever——

(*A look from MRS. BAXLEY.*)

—keeping it from her and from us and from everybody. That's where his cleverness comes in.

ELSIE (*rising and going to chair R. of table*). Yes, I suppose he must have been terribly clever all the time. And I never thought he was. (*She sits R. of table.*)

BAXLEY. Ah—I've always had my own ideas about him.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, his being clever was never one of them.

BAXLEY. Oh, yes, it was. I've had my suspicions for some time.

MRS. BAXLEY. That's news to me.

ELSIE. The kettle! (*She hurries into the kitchen.*)

BAXLEY. He's got a lot of brains, George has.

MRS. BAXLEY. Oh?

BAXLEY. Yes. Some of the things he's said to me showed that. He didn't bother saying them to you.

MRS. BAXLEY. I see.

BAXLEY. Good.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, it isn't good. And let me tell you he never struck me as being clever.

BAXLEY. Yes, but what do you know about it?

MRS. BAXLEY. I know this about it, (*rising, and then sitting on pouf beside him*) that he'd have been cleverer if he'd kept all this to himself. It's bad enough telling us, but he went and told that young fellow of Elsie's. Is that clever?

BAXLEY. Yes, if he wanted to get rid of him. And I believe that's what he was after.

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, and where's that young fellow—Harold—now?

BAXLEY. In bed, if he's any sense.

MRS. BAXLEY. You know what I mean. What's to prevent him going to the police and telling them?

BAXLEY. We had that out last night.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, let's have it out again this morning.

BAXLEY. I tell you, he's got no real evidence, and if he went to the police, they'd laugh at him. Besides, he wouldn't go. Would you?

MRS. BAXLEY. Me! Don't be silly. I don't want to see a policeman for weeks.

(*ELSIE returns with the teapot, which she places at top end of table.*)

ELSIE. I know he likes his tea strong, anyhow.

MRS. BAXLEY. That's a good thing, because by the time he comes down it'll have stewed itself as black as ink.

(*She rises, moves chair back to L. of table and sits again. BAXLEY cleans boots again.*)

I like my tea fresh.

ELSIE. You shall have a cup in a minute, Auntie. I expect Dad will be down soon. (*She sits on chair above table.*) And now I know he's so clever, I wish I didn't. I wish now I hadn't said he was dull and stupid. I wish he *was* dull and stupid again.

BAXLEY. How could he be dull again if he never was?

ELSIE (*distressed*). You know what I mean.

MRS. BAXLEY. Oh, don't bother with your uncle. He doesn't know what anybody means this morning.

ELSIE. I believe I started it last night by saying this was a dull and stupid place where nothing happened.

MRS. BAXLEY. I dare say you did—you and your young man between you.

BAXLEY. Don't be so silly. How could they start it when it's been going on for years?

MRS. BAXLEY (*with gesture—arms outstretched*). It was all in the cards.

BAXLEY. If it was (*imitating MRS. BAXLEY's gesture—boot on one hand*) "all in the cards," why didn't you tell us then?

MRS. BAXLEY. Elsie, didn't I say your dad was going to give us a big surprise?

BAXLEY. Well, what's the good of telling us we're going to get a big surprise, if you don't say what the surprise is?

MRS. BAXLEY. If I knew what it was, it wouldn't be a surprise, would it—cleverhead?

ELSIE. The point is, if I hadn't started talking like that, last night, we shouldn't have known all about this, and it's knowing about it that's so awful. I can't help thinking about it all the time.

MRS. BAXLEY. Same with me, just the same.

ELSIE. Besides, there's—Harold.

MRS. BAXLEY. Ah, yes. How's he going to take it?

BAXLEY. You saw how he took it last night. (*In loud, complacent tone.*) You've got to look at it this way—

(*There is a noise off R. of a door slamming upstairs.*)

ELSIE. He's coming down. (*She rises and steps back a little up L.O.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Shut up. He's here.

(*MRS. BAXLEY rises and steps to L. of her chair; BAXLEY rises, a boot in his right hand. They all three of them are instantly expectant, rigid, like soldiers awaiting a general. RADFERN enters*

from R., a bustling, genial figure, fully dressed except that he is wearing slippers. He comes to R.C. and is overcome by amusement at their appearance, etc.)

RADFERN. Good morning. Hello, what's all this? Three of you up?

BAXLEY (*respectfully*). Good morning, George.

RADFERN (*dryly*). Good morning, Bernard. I trust I see you well. And you, Lucy. (*Going up to ELSIE—above table—to kiss her.*) Morning, Elsie.

ELSIE. Good morning, Dad.

MRS. BAXLEY (*gloomily*). How did you sleep last night, George?

RADFERN (*heartily*). How did I sleep? I slept like a top. I always do. Don't you?

MRS. BAXLEY (*reproachfully*). I didn't last night. None of us did. (*She goes up to window and looks out.*)

RADFERN. Oh? Well, why have you all got up so early?

ELSIE. I thought I'd get your breakfast ready, Dad.

RADFERN. Very kind of you, Elsie, very kind of you. (*He goes down R. of and below table towards BAXLEY.*) And—er—(*looks quizzically at the other two*)—the Rajah . . . ?

BAXLEY. Well, old man, I thought I'd just look down and see if there was anything I could do. Like to make myself useful at times, y'know. Knew you were going off early.

RADFERN. Aren't those my boots?

BAXLEY (*off-handedly*). Yes. Matter of fact I've just been giving them a bit of a rub.

(*MRS. BAXLEY starts coming down to table.*)

RADFERN (*looking at them*). You've given them a very good rub, Bernard. Thank you. And what about you, Lucy?

MRS. BAXLEY (*rather defiantly—at R. of chair above table*). Oh—you needn't thank me. I came down because I couldn't sleep and I wanted a cup of tea.

RADFERN. Quite right. And have you had a cup of tea?

MRS. BAXLEY. No.

RADFERN (*sitting L. of table*). Then give your Aunt Lucy a cup of tea—quick, Elsie.

(*RADFERN sits down and looks quizzically from one to the other of them. ELSIE goes to kitchen for cup, saucer and spoon, which she puts on tray—top of table—then pours out a cup of tea for Mrs.*

BAXLEY, who sits above table.)

Well, well, well. My boots. Tea all ready. I call this being waited on hand and foot. (*He rises, goes and picks up boots.*) This is as good as being out East, Bernard. (*He sits again.*)

BAXLEY. Oh no. I was just saying, George, that a man like you—out East—would have twenty or thirty servants.

RADFERN (*pulling out footstool from under table*). I wouldn't know what to do with them.

ELSIE (*to L. of her father*). Dad, how do you like your eggs boiling?

RADFERN. I haven't touched a boiled egg for the last two years, Elsie. Don't agree with me. (*He is putting on his boots.*)

ELSIE (*self-reproachfully*). Shows how much I've been noticing things, doesn't it?

RADFERN (*affectionately*). Never mind.

ELSIE. What will you have for breakfast then, Dad?

BAXLEY. Want a good breakfast if you're travelling, George.

RADFERN. Oh—I always breakfast on the train. Helps to pass the time.

ELSIE. Oh—but I've made the tea.

RADFERN. That's all right. I've time for a cup of tea. Very nice.

MRS. BAXLEY. Where is it you're going, George?

RADFERN (*cheerfully*). I'm going to Birmingham for the day—on business.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). Business!

RADFERN. That's what I said—business. You don't think I'd go to Birmingham for pleasure, do you?

MRS. BAXLEY (*still bitter*). Yes—but there's business *and* business.

RADFERN (*genially, but with point*). You mean—there's your own business—and other people's business?

MRS. BAXLEY. No, I don't.

ELSIE (*reproachfully*). You know what she means, Dad.

RADFERN (*echoing MRS. BAXLEY*). "No, I don't."

BAXLEY. The queer work, that's what she means.

ELSIE. Yes—you know—crook stuff.

RADFERN. Crook stuff! Crook stuff! What a way to talk, especially early on Monday morning. Crook stuff.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, what do you call it then?

RADFERN. Business. Not crook stuff! This comes of going so often to the pictures. What would they think if they heard you at "Ben Machree"?

ELSIE (*earnestly, sitting on pouf*). But, Dad, you told us last night.

RADFERN. Oh—so I told you last night, did I?

BAXLEY. You know very well you spilt it all last night, George. Can't get out of it now. We know.

ELSIE. And I was awake all night thinking about it. And so were Uncle Bernard and Aunt Lucy.

BAXLEY. No, not all night.

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, you never stopped talking all night. I suppose you must have been talking in your sleep.

BAXLEY. And I suppose you must have been listening in your sleep.

RADFERN. Just a minute. Here's a very good rule, if you want to have a nice, quiet, comfortable existence——

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). Like you, I suppose, George?

RADFERN. Yes, like me. It's a rule I've just invented, but never mind about that. Somebody's got to invent the rules *some* time.

BAXLEY. Quite right, old man.

RADFERN. The rule's this. Never think or talk on Monday morning about something that's been said on Sunday night.

ELSIE (*half laughing, half tearful*). Oh, Dad—that's silly.

RADFERN. No, it isn't. On Monday morning you must start with a clean slate, because you're beginning a new week.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). Did you say—a clean slate?

RADFERN. That's what I said.

MRS. BAXLEY (*angrily*). Well, how you can talk like that, George Radfern, after all the things you told us last night and with the police perhaps ready to march in here any minute and take us all off——

(*A thundering knock outside R. She stops, rises, and gives a little scream.*)

What's that?

RADFERN (*coolly*). The postman.

(MRS. BAXLEY *sits again*.)

ELSIE (*hastily*). I'll go.

(*She hurries out below table through door R.*)

RADFERN (*looking at watch*). How's the time? Oh—I'm all right.

BAXLEY. Is there anything I can do for you, George?

RADFERN (*respectfully*). No, I don't think so, thank you, Bernard. You've done enough. Look at these boots. You mustn't spoil me just because I don't make an honest living.

(ELSIE *returns with three letters, two of which she passes over the table to RADFERN.*)

ELSIE. Two for you, Dad. This is mine. (*She sits R. of table to read her letter.*)

BAXLEY. Nothing for us then?

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, what should there be for us?

BAXLEY. Oh, I dunno. I thought one of the chaps might have written.

MRS. BAXLEY. What chaps?

BAXLEY. You know—the chaps.

MRS. BAXLEY. I heard you.

BAXLEY. All right then, if you heard me, shut up.

(ELSIE, *who has opened her letter and read it eagerly, gives a sharp cry of dismay.*)

RADFERN. What is it?

ELSIE (*in distress*). It's from Harold. He says he won't—oh, it's all over. (*She collapses on table, sobbing.*)

RADFERN (*going above table to R. of her*). Never mind, Elsie.

ELSIE (*tearfully*). Oh—but you don't understand—

RADFERN (*softly*). Listen, Elsie. Honestly, he's not worth bothering about—

ELSIE (*tearful and angry, cutting in*). It's all your fault. (*She rises to face him.*) You've done it. Oh!

(*With a fresh paroxysm of tears, she pushes RADFERN away and hurries towards door R. Before she gets there MRS. RADFERN appears in doorway. RADFERN breaks up R.C.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*astonished*). What's the matter?

ELSIE (*in tears*). Everything.

(*ELSIE pushes past and goes out R. MRS. RADFERN stares after her for a moment, then stares at the other three.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Now will anybody tell me what's happening in this house? (*She comes to chair R. of table and straightens the tablecloth.*) Elsie up early. You two up. Elsie crying. What in the name of wonder is it all about?

RADFERN (*coming to R. of her*). Leave Elsie alone, Mother. It's that blathering, weak-kneed, spineless young man of hers, Harold.

MRS. RADFERN. What's he done?

RADFERN. She's just had a letter from him. They've had some sort of quarrel. And he's just broken it off.

MRS. RADFERN. So that's it. (*Picking up and looking at the envelope, which ELSIE has left on table.*) I'd like to say something to that young man. Doesn't know his own mind.

BAXLEY. Never had one. Spotted it in a minute.

MRS. RADFERN. What does he want to make her miserable like that for? Who's he—I'd like to know—to be going on shilly-shallying and quarrelling—

RADFERN. He's not worth it. (*He moves up R.C.*)

BAXLEY. Of course he isn't. I could have told you that.

(*MRS. RADFERN crosses to door R.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Pity you don't tell us all you know.

RADFERN. Listen, Mother. (*Coming down to L. of MRS. RADFERN.*) Don't say anything to her. Leave her alone.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, that's all right, but I don't want her crying her eyes out all day—

RADFERN. Couldn't you take her out, for the day? Down into town—shopping—or something—?

MRS. RADFERN. I don't see how I can to-day, Dad. I've a lot to do, and I promised Mrs. Repington I'd go to the servants' registry for her this morning.

RADFERN (*going up to R. of Mrs. BAXLEY, who is still sitting above table*). Well, you're not doing anything this morning, are you, Lucy?

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). No, just enjoying myself, that's all.

RADFERN. Well, enjoy yourself a bit more, and you and Bernard take Elsie into the West End. Look at the shops. Go to the pictures.

MRS. BAXLEY. And see one of these crook films, I suppose?

RADFERN (*heartily*). That's it. Find a good crook film. Be a nice change after this dull suburb. Here. (*Takes two pound notes out of his pocket*.) Take these and help her to spend them.

MRS. BAXLEY (*taking the notes but looking at them dubiously*). All right—I suppose . . .?

RADFERN. Go on—they won't bite you.

MRS. RADFERN (*coming from door to R. of table*). But it's too much, Dad.

RADFERN. Oh—let her spend it.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). Plenty more where these come from, I expect.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, that's a nice way to talk, Lucy.

MRS. BAXLEY (*grimly*). I beg your pardon.

MRS. RADFERN. You'll go and make Elsie worse. I'm sure she doesn't know the value of money as it is. The way she talks sometimes, you'd think all you have to do is to pick money up in parcels.

MRS. BAXLEY (*grimly*). Indeed!

RADFERN (*crossing above table down to BAXLEY and kneeling on pouf, beside him*). Good idea that. Money in parcels. What do you say, Bernard?

BAXLEY (*embarrassed*). Er—yes—quite. (*Laughs falsely*.)

RADFERN. Better than looking round, eh? Wish I knew where to pick some up. (*He goes to L. of table, pushing footstool back under it.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. You ought to try Birmingham.

RADFERN. I think I will. Time to be off too. (*He crosses to door R., taking despatch-case from bookcase above door.*) If anybody wants me, you can say I'll be back about eight. Joe Fletten may call round. If he does, ask him to wait.

MRS. RADFERN. What, Joe Fletten again! He'll never be out of the house soon.

MRS. BAXLEY. No, these greenhouses do seem to give a lot of trouble, don't they?

RADFERN. You're right, Lucy, they do. Well, have a good day. (*He kisses Mrs. RADFERN.*) And keep Elsie quiet, you two. Must go now and earn an honest penny. (*He goes to door R.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*in a deep, disapproving tone*). A what?

RADFERN (*at door*). I said an honest penny. Bye-bye.

(RADFERN exits at door R. quickly.)

MRS. RADFERN (*going above table to kitchen for her overall, returning to up L.C., putting it on*). I don't know what brought you down so early this morning, Lucy, but you seem to have got out of the wrong side of the bed.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bristling*). Oh—and why?

BAXLEY. You know why, Lucy.

MRS. BAXLEY (*severely*). And you be quiet. (*To Mrs. RADFERN.*) May I ask what's the matter with me?

MRS. RADFERN. Well, George gives you two pounds to take Elsie out with—and if you ask me, it's a lot too much—and then you go and stare at him and at the money, without a word of thanks as if—as if—

MRS. BAXLEY. As if what?

MRS. RADFERN. I don't know. As if he'd stolen it or something, instead of having worked hard for years for it.

MRS. BAXLEY. I suppose he *has* worked hard for years for it?

MRS. RADFERN (*indignantly*). Of course he has. I've told you so many times.

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, but sometimes I think he looks a bit too pleased with himself to be a man who's worked hard for years.

MRS. RADFERN. Indeed! But you see *some* men don't mind working hard.

MRS. BAXLEY. That's one at you, Bernard. I'll leave you with it. (*She rises.*)

MRS. RADFERN. You can first explain what's the matter with you.

MRS. BAXLEY (*with cold dignity*). Perhaps I can get into the bathroom now.

(*She stalks out R.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Now what is the matter with her? She's very queer this morning. (*She goes to above table and puts cup on tray.*)

BAXLEY (*uneasily*). Oh—she didn't sleep so well last night.

MRS. RADFERN (*significantly*). Perhaps she could do with a change.

BAXLEY. Oh—no. Bit too much noise perhaps and not enough air.

MRS. RADFERN (*with hostility*). There's plenty of air in this house. (*She comes down to R. of him to pick up boot brushes and duster, which he has left on floor by pouf.*)

BAXLEY (*hastily*). Yes, but it all depends on what you're used to. Now when we were out in Singapore—

MRS. RADFERN (*coldly*). Just a minute, Bernard. You had a great time in Singapore, didn't you?

BAXLEY. Oh—yes, a great time, a great time.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, there's one thing you seem to forget about Singapore.

BAXLEY. Oh no, never forget anything about Singapore.

MRS. RADFERN. No, there's one thing you forget about it.

BAXLEY. What's that?

MRS. RADFERN. You forget that it's still there, waiting for you.

(She marches towards kitchen and exits.)

BAXLEY *(puzzled)*. Eh? . . . Oh—— Yes, yes. *(Laughing at this, he rises and goes to sideboard for banana. He sits on pouf, is commencing to eat the banana when it suddenly dawns on him and he turns his head sharply round in the direction of the kitchen.)*

QUICK CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

SCENE.—Same as Act I.

TIME.—Late afternoon, the same day.

When the CURTAIN rises, the room is empty. On the window-seat there is a book, "The Great Bank Mystery," and a work-basket on the desk. MRS. RADFERN enters from kitchen, goes to desk up R. for work-basket and brings it to L. of table. She is going to sit when she sees banana-skin on table. She picks it up, takes it to kitchen and throws it off. She comes back, sits L. of table and takes socks from work-basket.

The front door bell rings, and she goes out to open the door, and the sound of her voice and her visitor's can be heard a moment after. She returns, followed by INSPECTOR STACK, a plain-clothes officer, a smart-looking fellow about forty with an assured, authoritative manner. MRS. RADFERN likes the look of him.

STACK *(going to below table)*. Only for the day, eh?

MRS. RADFERN *(at door)*. Yes. Won't you sit down?

STACK *(crossing over to armchair L.)*. Thank you. *(He sits, putting bowler hat on floor beside him.)*

MRS. RADFERN *(going below table to L.C., chattily)*. Yes, he's gone to Birmingham on business, just for the day. He often goes there.

STACK. I see. Do you happen to know what time he'll be back to-night.

MRS. RADFERN. He said about eight o'clock.

STACK. Then if I called some time after eight, I'd catch him in.

MRS. RADFERN. Sure to. I don't think he'll be going out again. It'll be either the greenhouse or the wireless for him to-night.

STACK *(respectfully)*. Very wise of him too, Mrs. Radfern. I wish they'd let me have more nice quiet evenings at home like that.

MRS. RADFERN *(enjoying the little chat)*. Oh—my husband's always been quite a home bird, you know. His business takes him out, of course, and sometimes away too, but the minute he's

back, all he wants are his slippers and his pipe, and a book, or his greenhouse or the wireless. (*She sits L. of table to resume darning.*)

STACK. Let me see, he's in the paper trade, isn't he?

MRS. RADFERN. Yes, the wholesale paper trade, not newspapers, you know, but paper for printing and writing on, and chiefly very fine quality papers.

STACK (*blandly*). Good enough for—what shall we say?—bank-notes, eh?

MRS. RADFERN. I dare say, but I don't know exactly. But I do know his business is wholesale and always has been.

STACK. Got an office and a warehouse somewhere in the City, I suppose?

MRS. RADFERN. Oh yes. It's just off Cloth Fair, you know, by Smithfield. I remember the only time I went there, it was a very warm day and you could smell the meat in Smithfield Market—horrid it was.

STACK. I know. Never cared for that smell myself. Puts you off your beefsteaks. (*He laughs.*) And he's been able to keep going all right, through all these bad times?

MRS. RADFERN. Yes, I'm sure we can't grumble. He got a bit down four or five years ago—like a lot of other people, you know—no fault of theirs at all—

STACK (*sympathetically*). Quite. Just the hard times.

MRS. RADFERN. That's it. But, however, he's picked up again wonderfully since then. I'm sure we can't grumble at all.

STACK. And I'm sure you don't grumble, Mrs. Radfern.

MRS. RADFERN. Why do you say that?

STACK (*smiling politely*). Well, you don't look the grumbling sort.

MRS. RADFERN (*pleased*). Oh, I've always believed in making the best of everything. We're only on this earth once, I always say, and so we'd better make the best of it. (*With more energy, though not at all rudely.*) Though why I'm talking like this to a complete stranger, I really don't know. Let me see, you didn't give me your name, did you?

STACK. No. I'm sorry. (*He rises and takes card from pocket-book.*) Here's my card. (*Hands it over.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*reading*). Detective-Inspector Stack, Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. Good gracious! Are you from Scotland Yard? A detective?

STACK (*smiling*). I am. Do I look like one?

MRS. RADFERN. I'm sure I don't know. I've never seen anybody from Scotland Yard before. You certainly don't look like a policeman.

STACK. Well, that's something to be thankful for.

MRS. RADFERN. But what do you want with my husband?

STACK (*smoothly*). I'm only making a few inquiries, and Mr. Radfern's name was given to me as one of the people who might

be able to give me a little information. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but it's nothing sensational. Nobody murdered. No jewels stolen. Just one of those dull routine commercial cases. (*He sits again in armchair L.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Well, I'm sure if my husband can help you at all, he will. And it'll amuse him meeting somebody from Scotland Yard, because he's very fond of reading these detective stories. He's just made me read one with him. (*She puts visiting-card against ashtray on L. of table.*)

STACK. Well, I understand Mr. Radfern had some dealings with one of the firms in question, some years ago, so I thought he might be able to give me a little information. And then he gets up and down a good deal, I think, doesn't he?

MRS. RADFERN. Yes, he has to get about.

STACK. Birmingham, for instance. Of course, that's not very far, is it?

MRS. RADFERN. No, but that's about his nearest place. Sometimes he goes to Liverpool. And Newcastle. (*Her back is towards STACK.*)

STACK (*leaning forward eagerly*). And up into Scotland, I expect?

MRS. RADFERN. Yes, he has to go to Glasgow quite a lot.

STACK (*sitting back again*). Has he really? Still, that's not so troublesome as having to go abroad, after all.

MRS. RADFERN. Oh—he has to do that sometimes, too.

STACK. Yes? Well, I'm not surprised. I used to have a friend in the same line of business and he used to have to go quite often to Amsterdam and Brussels.

MRS. RADFERN. That's just where my husband has to go sometimes. Amsterdam and Brussels. He probably knows this friend of yours.

STACK. I wouldn't be surprised if he did.

MRS. RADFERN. You must ask him, if you're calling in to-night.

STACK. I will. (*Rising.*) I won't detain you any longer, Mrs. Radfern. I'll look in again to-night, if Mr. Radfern won't mind having a private little chat with me.

MRS. RADFERN (*rising and closing work-basket*). I'm sure he won't. (*She shakes hands with him.*)

(*Noise of people entering house.*)

Just a minute, (*coming to below table*) that's my daughter and my sister and her husband coming back. Do just let me introduce you because they'll be terribly interested in meeting a detective from Scotland Yard.

(*STACK nods, smiling, and stands L.C., half facing door. ELSIE, BAXLEY and MRS. BAXLEY enter from R. They stare at STACK, but MRS. RADFERN begins before they have a chance to speak. The*

positions are as follows : MRS. BAXLEY immediately above armchair R., BAXLEY R.C., ELSIE immediately below chair R. of table. STACK is standing just to R. of pouf and MRS. RADFERN below and to L. of table.)

(*Playfully.*) Now you three, I'll bet you anything you'll never guess who this is.

(*All three look inquiringly at STACK.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*gloomily*). Nobody I know.

BAXLEY (*hopefully*). The face seems familiar.

ELSIE. No, I can't guess.

MRS. RADFERN (*pleased with herself*). Well, this is Detective-Inspector Stack from Scotland Yard.

(*ELSIE, BAXLEY and MRS. BAXLEY instantly look the picture of dismay, alarm and horror. BAXLEY'S jaw drops. MRS. BAXLEY'S eyes nearly pop out of her head. STACK laughs at this.*)

You needn't look like that. If he'd come to lock you all up, you couldn't look worse. (*To STACK.*) I'm sorry. If they've all been up to something, I don't know what it is.

STACK. Oh, that's nothing. We get used to people looking at us like that. (*STACK crosses to door R. and they make way for him.*) Well, I'll call again to-night to see Mr. Radfern. Good afternoon.

(*STACK turns at door to take his leave and then goes out R., followed by MRS. RADFERN, who turns at door R., as if to say "you sillies!" The others are left in the same line. MRS. BAXLEY looks at BAXLEY and he looks at ELSIE, then crosses below table up to sideboard and pours himself out a whisky. MRS. BAXLEY goes to above table. ELSIE turns up R.C., taking off her hat, which she puts on table. BAXLEY drops down to pouf and then MRS. RADFERN re-enters from R.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Well, I must say you're a fine lot. It's a wonder he didn't think you were a lot of crooks or something. Such a nice man, I thought, too. Superior, and very gentlemanly manners, I'm sure. What's the matter?

ELSIE. Mother, (*taking a step towards her*) was he really from Scotland Yard and wanting to see Dad?

MRS. RADFERN. Of course.

BAXLEY. My God! (*Sitting on pouf, mopping his brow.*) Here, Lucy, we're packing. (*He rises and goes to below L. of table.*)

MRS. RADFERN. What do you mean, you're packing? What's the matter?

MRS. BAXLEY. Arresting and prison and penal servitude's the matter.

ELSIE (*going to her mother and breaking down on her*). Oh—Mother!

BAXLEY (*moving below table towards door*). Come on, Lucy. We're getting out of this—sharp.

MRS. RADFERN (*pushing ELSIE off and shutting door*). Oh no, you're not, Bernard, not until you've told me what's wrong.

(*ELSIE turns up R.C., crying.*)

What have you done?

BAXLEY (*indignantly*). Me! (*He crosses back L. below table.*) I've done nothing.

MRS. BAXLEY. No, don't start trying to blame it on to us now.

MRS. RADFERN. Blame what on to you?

MRS. BAXLEY. Better ask Elsie. This isn't any place for us.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, it's going to be until you tell me what it is you're all frightened of.

ELSIE. Oh—Mother—it's Dad.

MRS. RADFERN. Dad!

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*). Yes, Dad, your precious, quiet, respectable George with his honest pennies.

ELSIE. It's true, Mother. He told us himself, last night.

MRS. RADFERN (*exasperated*). Told you *what*, you stupid?

MRS. BAXLEY. Told us he was a crook.

BAXLEY. And been one for years. (*He breaks away down L.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Every penny dishonest.

BAXLEY. Working with a big gang, all the detectives after them.

MRS. BAXLEY (*moving round to L. of table*). And proud of it, glories in it.

BAXLEY (*coming to down L. of table and thumping it*). And he'll get years and years, penal servitude.

ELSIE (*tearfully*). Oh—Mother, it's true. (*She sits above table, crying.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*R.C., loudly*). Stop, stop.

(*They are quiet, so she continues quietly.*)

Now what is it you're all trying to tell me? What did Dad say to you last night?

BAXLEY. You'd better get Elsie to tell you. (*Crossing below table towards door R.*) We're going to pack.

MRS. RADFERN (*stopping him*). No, you're not. Nobody's leaving this room until I understand exactly what all this is about.

(*BAXLEY, with resigned gesture, crosses back below table to armchair L. and sits.*)

Now who's going to tell me?

MRS. BAXLEY Go on, Elsie. (*Sitting L. of table.*) You tell her.

ELSIE. Last night, just before you came back, Dad told us that he hadn't been in the paper business for years, but that he'd been a crook.

MRS. RADFERN (*coming forward to behind chair R. of table.*) He told you and Lucy and Bernard here—

ELSIE. And Harold.

MRS. RADFERN. Oh, he told Harold too, did he?

ELSIE. Yes. And he said he'd been a sort of crook for years, and that he worked for a big international gang—

BAXLEY. That started in America.

MRS. RADFERN. I see. That started in America. Go on.

ELSIE. And that they swindled banks, in America, and here and in France and all over.

BAXLEY. Counterfeiting notes and forging bonds.

MRS. BAXLEY. All sorts of dangerous dirty tricks.

ELSIE. And that the detectives had been trying for years to track down this gang but they couldn't manage it, but if he was caught, he'd get years and years of prison.

BAXLEY. And so he would too.

MRS. RADFERN. And that's what he told all the four of you, is it?

ELSIE. Yes—and Mother, it's true. And that's why he has to keep going to various places, up and down the country, and abroad. And that's why Mr. Fletten comes here such a lot, because he's working for this gang too, and he doesn't really know anything about greenhouses—that's—

BAXLEY. Just a blind, just a blind. He's taken everybody in up to now, but this time he's for it.

MRS. RADFERN. And he asked you not to tell me?

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes. Said you didn't know, and weren't to know, though I must say how he's kept it from you all this time beats me.

MRS. RADFERN. Oh—that's quite simple.

MRS. BAXLEY. Is it?

MRS. RADFERN. Certainly it is. I can explain in three seconds why he's never told me and yet told you all about it last night.

BAXLEY. Why?

MRS. RADFERN. Because he knew very well that you were four silly fools who'd believe any nonsense he told them, and he knew very well he couldn't come out with that silly stuff in front of me. Can't you see he was simply having a game with you? And serve you right too. Just because he likes to be quiet when he's at home, you've got it into your heads that he's a dull old stick. I've heard you say as much, Elsie. And you two are as bad. (*She goes up to R. of ELSIE.*) And as for your Harold, I know what Dad was trying to do to him—just scaring him away. And is that why you had

that letter from him this morning, breaking it off, and why you cried your eyes out?

ELSIE. Yes, of course.

MRS. RADFERN. And why you were all so queer and said you hadn't slept last night?

MRS. BAXLEY (*with dignity*). Naturally.

MRS. RADFERN. And why you all got up so early this morning?

BAXLEY. That's it.

MRS. RADFERN. Then you're all sillier than I ever thought you were. (*She returns to back of chair R. of table.*)

ELSIE. But Mother, it's true.

MRS. RADFERN (*turning*). Of course it isn't true. Not a word of truth in it. Do you think I wouldn't have known. How you could ever have thought it was true, I can't imagine.

BAXLEY. It's all right talking like that—

MRS. RADFERN. And now I suppose you thought that Inspector had come to arrest him. If you want to know, that Inspector was only making some inquiries about a commercial case—

BAXLEY. That's what *he* says.

MRS. RADFERN. Oh—have some sense, Bernard, even if you have been to Singapore. (*She breaks away R., then returns again to chair R. of table.*) Do you think I'd be calmly talking about it like this if I thought for a minute Dad had ever done anything wrong?

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, you don't know he hasn't.

BAXLEY. *We* heard him last night, remember—not you.

MRS. RADFERN. I know that story he told you last night was all nonsense, just made up to tease you and frighten you.

ELSIE (*rising, going to her, hopefully*). Oh Mother, do you think it was?

MRS. RADFERN. I tell you, I *know* it was.

BAXLEY. But you can't prove it.

MRS. RADFERN (*triumphantly*). I can. (*She goes R. of and above ELSIE to window-seat and picks up the book there, bringing it to top of table, L. of ELSIE.*) You see this book.

(*BAXLEY rises and goes up to L. of MRS. RADFERN to look. Elsie gets to R. of her mother.*)

It's called "The Great Bank Mystery." I've just read it, and Dad's just read it. And if you want to know all the rest of that story about the international gang of bank swindlers and bond-forgers that started in America, you'll find it in this book.

BAXLEY (*dropping down L.*). Well, I'll be damned! (*He sits on pouf, mopping brow again.*)

ELSIE (*joyfully*). Mother. (*Hugs her.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*grumbling*). Well, that's a nice trick, frightening people with a lot of silly stuff out of a detective tale!

BAXLEY. Yes, it's a bit thick.

MRS. BAXLEY (*indignantly*). It's a lot thick.

MRS. RADFERN (*suddenly beginning to laugh*). Dad's a monkey

MRS. BAXLEY. And I call it a foul monkey trick, too. I've had an awful day. Every time I've set eyes on a policeman I've shivered, and when I found that detective here my heart stopped and my blood went cold. I might easily be ill after this.

BAXLEY. Well, I must say it's not my idea of a joke.

MRS. RADFERN (*still laughing*). Evidently not, Bernard. But it seems to be George's. And very well he did it too, though he'll hear something from me about it when he comes back.

ELSIE (*happily embracing her mother again*). Oh, I don't care now. Everything's different. It's been awful. (*Looking R.*) I'll never say anybody's dull again—never, never, never. (*She works her way towards door R.*) I don't care how dull they are. It's all nice and safe and sensible again now. Lovely.

(*She hurries out R.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Well, she's feeling a lot better already. (*Sitting above table.*) It was silly of George to frighten her like that. Poor Elsie! (*She takes her work-basket.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. And what about us, Dorothy? Weren't we frightened, too?

BAXLEY. I've been worried to death about George ever since he told us that story.

MRS. BAXLEY. So have I. And I do think, Dorothy, that George owes us some consideration after this silly trick he's played on us.

MRS. RADFERN. You do, eh?

MRS. BAXLEY. Yes, I do. He's not been as pleasant as he might have been these last few days, and I hope he'll realize now that the least thing he can do is to help Bernard to buy that little business we've talked about.

(*BAXLEY has risen and gone up to sideboard. He takes banana and crossing below table gets to behind chair R. of table as he starts to eat it.*)

BAXLEY. Well, seeing you've mentioned it, Lucy, I might as well say that's what I feel too. He's had his fun—

MRS. RADFERN (*very quietly*). And now he must pay for it. Is that it?

BAXLEY. Oh—you can't put it like that. But you know our position, Dorothy. If George can let me have a temporary loan of a few hundreds and we can stay on here until the deal goes through—

MRS. BAXLEY. I don't think you can object to that, Dorothy. And you can tell him how much he's upset me with that silly joke of his—

MRS. RADFERN (*quietly, but decisively*). Just a minute. I want to understand you properly. You both feel that, after this, I ought to persuade George to let you have the money, and I also ought to ask you to stay on until you've bought the business you're after. Is that it?

BAXLEY. Yes, that's it.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, Lucy—and Bernard—I'm going to tell you straight what I think about it. I think—you're both the limit. And I see now that Dad was right about you and I was wrong.

MRS. BAXLEY. What do you mean? (*She rises.*)

MRS. RADFERN. I mean that he was right in not wanting to put up with you any longer. You're my relations, not his. You've taken advantage of his good-nature, and so have I, through you. You've stayed here and borrowed money from him too often. He'd had enough of it when he told you that story last night. And now I've had enough of it too. (*She shuts work-basket and rises.*)

BAXLEY. But here, half a minute, what have we done?

(MRS. RADFERN *snatches banana skin from BAXLEY, puts it in waste-paper basket and returns to above table.*)

MRS. RADFERN. You've shown me quite plainly you don't really care tuppence about him, and that you're only here to get what you can out of him. Only a few minutes ago, when you thought he was in trouble and might be arrested, what did you do? All you thought about was yourselves. You wanted to pack up and go at once. I had to stop you going out of that door.

(ELSIE *comes in and goes to above door R.*)

Well, now I'm not stopping you. You can pack and go as soon as you like. (*She crosses to sideboard with her work-basket.*)

(MRS. BAXLEY and BAXLEY *look at each other.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. That's a nice thing to say to a sister, isn't it?

MRS. RADFERN. No, it isn't, but that's how I feel, Lucy.

BAXLEY. More shame to you. Come on, Lucy. We'll pack. I'm not staying where I'm not wanted. (*Goes to door R. Then, turning at door.*) I'd laugh now if the old boy really was a wrong 'un all the time. (*He exits R.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Well, you'll have to find something else to laugh at, Bernard.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly, at door*). That oughtn't to be difficult—here. (*She crosses below table and exits R.*)

ELSIE (*above door R.*). Are they going?

MRS. RADFERN (*at downstage end of sideboard*). Yes. I told them to. They've been sponging on Dad long enough and they're

not going to get anything else out of him. Wanted to bolt as soon as they thought he was in trouble.

(*ELSIE goes above table to telephone.*)

What are you going to do?

ELSIE. I'm going to tell Harold it was all Dad's nonsense. At least I'm going to ask him to come here, so that I can tell him.

MRS. RADFERN. He broke it off, didn't he, after what he heard last night?

ELSIE. Yes.

MRS. RADFERN. Another one that was found out.

ELSIE (*coming down to R. of MRS. RADFERN*). Well, Mother, you can't blame him for not wanting to be engaged to the daughter of a crook.

MRS. RADFERN (*sharply, derisively*). Can't you?

ELSIE (*doing her best*). No, of course you can't.

MRS. RADFERN. Can't you?

ELSIE (*confusedly*). No. (*Dropping her head.*) Yes—I suppose you can.

MRS. RADFERN (*putting her arm round ELSIE*). Of course you can blame him. (*Bringing ELSIE down to pouf where she sits with ELSIE facing her.*) He ought to have been ready to stick to you, whatever your father turned out to be. And you know it. I can see Dad's right about your Harold. He's a weak-kneed, shuffling boy—just out for what he can safely get.

ELSIE. You've no right to say that, Mother. I don't blame Harold really for breaking it off. And anyhow, he deserves another chance.

(*She starts to go up to telephone, but MRS. RADFERN is holding her hand and restrains her.*)

I'll tell him it was all a joke.

MRS. RADFERN. If you do, I'll be ashamed of you.

ELSIE. What for?

MRS. RADFERN. Well, where's your pride?

ELSIE. I don't see where my pride comes in. After all, it *was* a joke.

MRS. RADFERN. This is where your pride comes in, or ought to come in. He's proved already that he's not sufficiently fond of you to marry you whatever your father is.

ELSIE (*hurt by this, dropping to her knees with her head in MRS. RADFERN'S lap*). Don't—Mother.

MRS. RADFERN (*stroking ELSIE'S hair*). And now you want to tell him it's all right. If it was me, I wouldn't have him on those terms. You get him up here—give him a last chance if you like—but don't tell him that last night was a joke. Let him think it's still serious and then ask him if he still wants to break off the engagement finally. That'll be a fair test.

ELSIE. All right, Mother, I'll do that. (*She rises, embraces her mother, then goes up and begins dialling at telephone.*) I'll simply ask him to come and see me, and then when he comes, I won't say a word about last night's business not being true.

(*MRS. RADFERN is shaking her head.*)

Hello, is that eight-two-four-nine? . . . I want Mr. Harold Russ.

MRS. RADFERN (*rising*). And I want a cup of tea. (*She goes up into kitchen.*)

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE.—*Same as Act II.*

TIME.—*Evening of the same day.*

The book up R. and the INSPECTOR'S card by ashtray down L. are still prominent on the table in centre. Above the door R. is a fairly large suitcase, with a hat and raincoat on top of it. BAXLEY is discovered at sideboard finishing a whisky. He makes as if to take a banana, changes his mind, feels in his pockets for cigarette-case and goes above table to door R.

BAXLEY (at door, calling). I say, Lucy. Lucy. I can't find my cigarette-case. (Pauses, listening to reply.) No. It isn't. I tell you . . . Is it? Oh, all right.

(He re-enters, takes cigarette-case from pocket of raincoat on bag above door, is about to take cigarette, but finds the case empty. He puts his case on R. of table and goes up to desk for box of cigarettes, which he brings down to table. He fills his cigarette-case and returns box to desk. He then comes back to table to take cigarette from case, changes his mind, puts his case in pocket, goes up to desk and takes a cigarette from box and returns to R. of table to light it.)

(The door bell rings, off R.)

(BAXLEY exits R. There is the noise of the front door opening and shutting, of voices, and BAXLEY re-enters above table to L.C., HAROLD following him in to R.C.)

HAROLD. Isn't Elsie in?

BAXLEY. Yes, she'll be down in a minute. She's helping my wife to finish her packing.

HAROLD. What? You off?

BAXLEY. Yes. Night train to Scotland—Dundee. Got a brother there. Nothing for me down here, you know.

HAROLD (sceptically). No?

BAXLEY. Oh no. Not the right sort of opening. They tried to persuade me to take an agency for business supplies—exclusive agency too—chap called Simpson—I said, "What's the good of business supplies, when business itself is so bad?" That stumped him. Mind you, there's an opening there—in a small way. Might

suit a youngster like yourself. But no good to me. So I'm on the move. I like to be on the move, always did. (*He moves away down L.*) Bit of a roamer, you know, old man, bit of a roamer.

HAROLD (*putting his hat on table, sceptical*). Sez you.

BAXLEY. What's the sez you about? (*He turns and goes up to chair L. of table.*) We're not doing a talkie.

HAROLD (*sitting R. of table*). No, but you're not going to tell me that you're clearing out so suddenly just because you like travelling.

BAXLEY. Oh?

HAROLD. No, I know why you're going, and I don't blame you.

BAXLEY (*sitting L. of table*). Very good of you, old man, but still I don't know what you're talking about.

HAROLD. And I think if I'd any sense, I wouldn't be here either.

BAXLEY. Of course you wouldn't. Marriage is a mug's . . . (*He looks at door, which HAROLD has left open, and continues, sotto voce.*) Marriage is a mug's game, you can take it from me.

HAROLD. I'm not talking about marriage.

BAXLEY. Then why shouldn't you be here?—Oh—you mean because of what he told us last night?

HAROLD. Yes, of course.

BAXLEY. And you still believe that?

HAROLD. Yes, don't you?

BAXLEY. Of course not. All a joke. Bit of leg-pulling, that's all. We're always pulling one another's legs here, you know. Sometimes I pull his leg, sometimes he pulls mine. Last night it was his turn.

HAROLD. It was his turn all right.

BAXLEY. And he's taken you in all this time. Well, you surprise me. I thought you were smart. In the second-hand car trade, too.

HAROLD. Was it a joke?

BAXLEY. Yes. All rot. Out of a book. There's the book.

HAROLD. Look here, are you sure?

BAXLEY. Well, I know a book when I see one.

HAROLD. Yes, but I mean—are you sure it did come from that book and it was a joke?

BAXLEY. I keep telling you, don't I? If you don't want to believe me, don't. It doesn't matter to me.

HAROLD. Oh well, I do believe you. Does Elsie know?

BAXLEY. Yes. She knows.

HAROLD. I suppose she's asked me to come so that she can tell me, though she could have done that on the telephone.

BAXLEY (*looking cunning*). Perhaps she isn't going to tell you.

HAROLD. Of course she's going to tell me. Why shouldn't she?

BAXLEY. She might be going to try you out.

HAROLD. Try me out? Oh—I see, pretend it wasn't a joke. Keep the old man's game up for him, eh?

BAXLEY. It's a possibility, isn't it?

HAROLD. Yes. (*He rises and moves away R.*) Look here, don't tell her you've told me that it was all a joke.

BAXLEY. No, I won't tell her. I hope it works—both for her sake and her father's. Serve 'em right. (*Suddenly he realizes he has put his foot in it and looks across at HAROLD covertly.*)

HAROLD (*now up R.C.*). What do you mean—serve them right? (*He comes above table to L. of BAXLEY.*) Do you mean I'd serve them right, because if you do, you're being very insulting.

BAXLEY. Then that isn't what I mean. (*Looks at his watch.*) Time's going on. (*Goes to door R. and shouts outside.*) I say, it's time we were off. . . . Well, come on, then. Oh, all right.

(*He goes out R. HAROLD is up L.C. He takes out pocket mirror and combs his hair. After a moment, ELSIE enters from R.*)

ELSIE (*coming to below table*). Hello, Harold.

HAROLD (*joining her below table*). Hello, Elsie. You see, I came as soon as I could.

(*He tries to kiss her, but she fends him off, pushing past him and crossing L.*)

ELSIE. No, I want to talk first.

HAROLD. Oh, all right. (*Going to below chair R. of table.*) Well, let's talk then.

ELSIE. Wait a minute. My uncle and aunt are just going.

(*Enter MRS. BAXLEY R., dressed for travelling and carrying a small case.*)

MRS. BAXLEY (*going to R. of HAROLD*). Oh—you're here again, are you?

HAROLD. Yes—do you mind?

MRS. BAXLEY (*crossing below HAROLD to below table*). It doesn't matter to me who's here, (*putting case on table and drawing on her gloves*) though I know one who won't be here again for a long time—not if some people beg on their bended knees—and that's me.

(*HAROLD wanders up to desk. Finding cigarette-box empty, he takes one from his case, lights it and drifts to above table.*)

ELSIE. Must you go now, Aunt Lucy?

MRS. BAXLEY. Your Uncle Bernard says so, if we're going to get that train.

ELSIE. You won't wait to say good-bye to Mother? She'll be back in a minute.

MRS. BAXLEY. No, thank you. If I could wait, I wouldn't. But you can give her one message from me.

ELSIE. What's that?

MRS. BAXLEY. Just remind her, from me, that there's no smoke without fire. That's all. No smoke without fire.

(BAXLEY makes a noise with luggage off R. He enters from R. with hat on, carrying another bag and an umbrella. He puts second bag by first bag, above door.)

Here you are then. I'm all ready.

BAXLEY (*above luggage, by door R.*). What about a taxi?

MRS. BAXLEY. We're not having any taxis. We can go to the station by Tube, can't we?

BAXLEY. Yes, but what about from here to the Tube?

MRS. BAXLEY. We can walk that.

BAXLEY (*tapping bags with umbrella*). What, with these bags?

HAROLD (*maliciously*). It's ten minutes' walk.

MRS. BAXLEY (*going up to L. of BAXLEY*). Ten minutes' walk won't kill us.

BAXLEY (*throwing down his umbrella*). No, it won't kill you but it will kill me, carrying these bags. (*Putting on his raincoat.*) This comes of giving the Old Country a chance. Carrying bags. It's a good job some of the chaps I knew out East can't see me now.

MRS. BAXLEY (*coldly*). What chaps?

BAXLEY. Well—— You know—the chaps out East.

MRS. BAXLEY. To hear you talk, anybody would think you'd been Emperor of China. What chaps?

BAXLEY (*shouting*). Never mind what chaps. I don't like carrying these damned bags. So there. (*He picks up hat-box.*)

MRS. BAXLEY. Well, you'll have to put up with it for once. Good-bye, Elsie.

(*She goes to ELSIE down L.O. and puts her face out to be kissed. ELSIE kisses her. She then goes back to table, picks up her case and crosses to towards door R.*)

And just try and be sensible, though that won't always be easy in this house. (*To HAROLD.*) Good-bye.

HAROLD (*above table*). Good-bye.

MRS. BAXLEY (*very grimly*). Pleased to have met you. (*Ignoring hat-box which BAXLEY is holding out.*) Come on, Bernard.

(*She stalks out R.*)

BAXLEY (*throwing down hat-box, which he has held out for Mrs. BAXLEY*). Ten minutes' walk! It's murder. I've known stronger chaps than me strain their hearts doing silly things like this. (*He crosses above table, below HAROLD to sideboard.*)

ELSIE. Never mind, Uncle, you'll be able to have a good rest in the train.

BAXLEY (*grumbling*). Good rest! A stopping train to Dundee. I'll be able to take root. (*He takes bunch of bananas from sideboard*

and comes down L.C.—R. of *ELSIE*—putting them in his raincoat pocket.)

ELSIE (coming forward and kissing him). Good-bye, Uncle.

BAXLEY. Good-bye, Elsie.

HAROLD. Good-bye.

BAXLEY. Oh, good-bye. (He has crossed below table and up to above luggage and buttons his raincoat. He puts hat-box under left arm and picks up smaller bag with left hand. Remembering umbrella, he picks it up and puts it also through left arm. He then picks up the larger bag with right hand and goes to door R.)

(*ELSIE* has knelt on chair L. of table, watching.)

(*Groaning*.) Good-bye.

(*BAXLEY* goes out R., followed by *ELSIE*. You hear the outer door banged to, then *ELSIE* returns and comes to below table.)

HAROLD (going to armchair L. and sitting on upstage arm of it). They're clearing off suddenly, aren't they?

ELSIE. Yes, as soon as they thought we were in trouble, they wanted to pack up and go, and that made Mother angry——

HAROLD (puzzled). In trouble? You mean, because of what your father told us last night?

ELSIE. Oh—it went further than that, because they thought somebody was coming here to arrest Dad. So they wanted to go at once. So then Mother told them to go. She doesn't like people who leave you in the lurch, and (meaningly) I don't either.

HAROLD (rising). But wait a minute. There isn't anybody coming here to arrest your father?

ELSIE (watching him). Perhaps.

HAROLD (watching her, with faint smile). Well—I don't care. (He sits again on arm.)

ELSIE (eagerly). Harold—do you mean that? (She comes and kneels on pouf beside him.)

HAROLD (whose tone must suggest insincerity). Yes, I do. I really came to tell you how sorry I was—and am—about the way I went off last night and the letter I wrote to you. You see—I hadn't time to think. The whole thing completely took me by surprise.

ELSIE. You hadn't time to think about—what?

HAROLD. About you. And me. When all that stuff came out, last night, all I felt—as any honest man would—was that I must keep out of this. And for the moment—well—I suppose I mixed you up in it. I realize now that's where I was wrong. It's got nothing to do with us what your father is and does.

ELSIE (sitting back on her heels). Do you really mean that, Harold?

HAROLD (uneasily). Yes, Elsie.

ELSIE (gravely). Are you sure?

HAROLD (still uneasy). Well—yes.

ELSIE. Think of the disgrace, though, if Dad is found out.

HAROLD (*with mock nobility*). Never mind. We'll stick it. (*Smoothing his hair with a gesture.*) And, after all, your father was exaggerating it, wasn't he?

ELSIE. Was he?

HAROLD. You know he was. I should think he's rather a leg-puller, anyhow, isn't he?

ELSIE (*solemnly*). Oh no. Dad isn't. That's not like him at all. Now, Uncle Bernard—you know, the one who was here just now—he'd say anything for tuppence. You can't believe a word he says.

HAROLD (*uneasily*). Can't you?

ELSIE. Good Lord, no! He's an awful mischief-maker and a liar. I hope he hasn't said anything to you.

HAROLD. Er—no—of course not.

ELSIE (*watching him*). That's all right then, because you simply can't believe him. Dad's quite different.

HAROLD. Look here—(*rising*) I don't quite understand this.

ELSIE (*rising and going to L. of table*). Well, it doesn't matter, does it? (*She pushes chair under table.*) After all, the important thing is—us. (*She turns to face him, leaning against table.*)

HAROLD. Oh yes—of course.

ELSIE. That's all that matters, isn't it?

HAROLD (*approaching her*). Yes.

ELSIE. No, I'm not going to kiss you—just yet.

HAROLD (*going to embrace her*). Oh—come on, Elsie.

ELSIE (*stopping him by the tone of her voice*). You must remember, Harold, you upset me terribly—running away like that last night and then writing me that letter. I haven't got over it yet.

HAROLD. Well, I've told you it's all right now.

ELSIE. Yes, it may be for you, but it isn't for me. I'd given you up, you see. And it'll take me a very long time to get very fond of you all over again.

HAROLD. No, it won't.

ELSIE (*who now puts the table between them by going below it to sit R. of it*). Yes, it will. Besides, I want to talk. And if you're kissing, you can't talk seriously.

HAROLD. Well, we don't need to talk seriously. (*Putting out cigarette in ashtray L. of table.*) I've told you I want you, and I don't care now what your father is and does. (*He catches sight of the card on the table and stares at it.*)

ELSIE (*when he has picked it up*). What's the matter?

HAROLD (*uneasily*). I suppose this is part of the joke, too?

ELSIE (*coolly*). Oh—the card. No, the man left it when he came here this afternoon.

HAROLD. An Inspector from Scotland Yard?

ELSIE. Yes, he came here this afternoon, to see Dad. And he's coming again to-night.

HAROLD. My God! (*He drops card—top L. of table.*)

ELSIE (*watching him*). Oh—I was terribly upset at first, but I've got over it now.

HAROLD (*moving L.C., angrily*). Look here, what's going on here? First, your father tells us all that stuff about being a crook, and then your uncle tells me it's all a joke, and now you say there's somebody coming from Scotland Yard.

ELSIE. So Uncle told you it was all a joke?

HAROLD (*sulkily*). If you must know—yes.

ELSIE (*rising*). And you didn't tell me he told you. You let me think you didn't know.

HAROLD. Well, what does that matter?

ELSIE. It matters a lot.

HAROLD (*flinging away, then turning on her*). I'm fed up with this. Is it a joke or isn't it? And if it is a joke, why did this chap from Scotland Yard come here?

ELSIE. You'd better wait and ask him. He'll be here soon.

HAROLD (*nervously*). I'm not going to wait for him, I can tell you that. (*Going towards door, as far as below table, to pick up his hat.*) It's no business of mine.

(*Noise outside.*)

ELSIE (*scornfully*). There's somebody there now.

(*ELSIE goes to above table. HAROLD moves to L.C.*)

Hadn't you better go while there's time?

(*Enter RADFERN and FLETTEN from R. They are a moment together by the door.*)

RADFERN (*heartily*). Hello, Elsie. (*Going up to desk.*) I found Joe Fletten here waiting on the doorstep. (*He puts his despatch-case on the desk and goes to R. of ELSIE.*) Hello, what's the matter?

(*FLETTEN comes to above door R.*)

ELSIE. I think you'd better go now, Harold.

RADFERN (*to HAROLD, rather grimly*). I thought you had gone—for good.

ELSIE. So did I, this morning. But I thought I'd give him another chance. And now you can tell him, Dad.

RADFERN. Tell him what?

ELSIE. You can tell him what we found out from Mother this afternoon, that what you said last night was all a joke and that Harold ran away for nothing.

RADFERN. Oh—you've found that out, have you?

ELSIE. Yes, Mother showed us the book—(*picking up book from top of table*) it's this one, isn't it?—you got all that stuff out of.

FLETTEN. What stuff? Or is this private and confidential?

ELSIE. No, it isn't. Dad, last night, pretended he was a crook

FLETTEN (*humorously shocked*). Mr. Radfern, how could you!

ELSIE. And told us a lot of stuff he got out of this book. We all believed him at the time, and Harold here still thinks it's true and wants to run away.

FLETTEN (*crossing below table to R. of HAROLD, L.C., severely to HAROLD*). Do you mean to say you could believe for one minute that my friend, Mr. Radfern, was a crook? Mr. Radfern of all people!

RADFERN. Oh, he swallowed it all right.

HAROLD (*sulkily*). And so did everybody else.

FLETTEN. Where's your intelligence, young man? Where's your what's it?—you know—sense of character. Mr. Radfern a crook! You'll be thinking I'm a crook next.

ELSIE (*demurely*). We all did.

FLETTEN. What, me! Poor old Joe Fletten, who never did anybody any harm. And is this your idea of a joke, Mr. Radfern?

RADFERN. Sorry, Joe. Just a bit of fun on my part. But I thought it might catch one or two people.

FLETTEN (*severely, looking at HAROLD*). And it seems to have done.

RADFERN. Have your Aunt Lucy and Uncle Bernard gone?

ELSIE. Yes, but that was because Mother told them to go.

RADFERN. That's all right, as long as they've gone.

FLETTEN (*to HAROLD*). Don't you think you might apologize to one or two of us?

HAROLD. No, I don't. (*Crossing below FLETTEN and table to door R.*) Look here, I've had enough of this.

ELSIE (*sadly*). All right, Harold. I gave you a chance, you know. Dad was right after all. Good-bye.

HAROLD (*turning at door, as if about to break out angrily*). Oh—good night.

(*He swings away and goes out quickly R., with RADFERN following him. ELSIE sits above table and collapses on it, crying. FLETTEN looks at her, clears his throat as if to speak, thinks better of it and hums a little. When RADFERN returns to R.C., MRS. RADFERN, dressed in her outdoor things, follows him in, carrying a bag of fruit and a bag of bananas.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*crossing between table and FLETTEN to sideboard*). Good evening, Mr. Fletten. (*To ELSIE.*) So Lucy and Bernard have gone?

ELSIE. Yes, quarter of an hour ago. And so has Harold.

MRS. RADFERN. I know that. I nearly bumped into him at the front gate. Has he—gone for good?

(*Through following scene MRS. RADFERN is putting out fruit and bananas on sideboard.*)

ELSIE (*rather unhappily*). Yes. Tried and tested—and found wanting.

RADFERN. Never mind, Elsie. (*He goes up to R. of her to comfort her.*) I'll think of something very nice to make up for it.

FLETTEN (*up L.O.*). Young man actually thought your husband and me was a pair of crooks or something. The cheek of it!

MRS. RADFERN. Oh—that was only George's nonsense, last night. And a very silly thing to do, too, Dad.

FLETTEN. I can't understand how anybody believed it for a minute.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, I must say, I'm surprised, too.

RADFERN. I did it very well.

FLETTEN (*sententiously*). Well, I wouldn't have thought you had it in you, Mr. Radfern, to play a part like that well—even for a bit of a joke. And I doubt if it's anything to joke about.

MRS. RADFERN. I rather agree with you there, Mr. Fletten.

(*ELSIE rises.*)

FLETTEN (*as before*). We oughtn't to trifle with our good names—even in fun. That's what I feel.

RADFERN (*above ELSIE towards FLETTEN, so that he is at top L. of table, dryly*). And it does you credit.

ELSIE (*as she begins moving towards door R.*). As a matter of fact, it wasn't anything Dad had said, but that card that caught Harold out to-night.

RADFERN. What card?

ELSIE (*turning in doorway*). That one on the table.

(*Goes out R.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*amused*). Oh—how absurd! She means the one left by the man from Scotland Yard.

FLETTEN (*with a quick look to RADFERN, alarmed*). From where?

RADFERN (*quietly*). What's this about, then, Mother?

MRS. RADFERN. Well, it's all rather amusing. It happened that a Detective-Inspector from Scotland Yard called to see you this afternoon—a very nice man indeed, and we had quite a nice little chat—

FLETTEN (*with glances of despair at RADFERN*). Did you now?

MRS. RADFERN. And he left his card. (*She has finished arranging fruit and now turns to them.*) But what was so amusing was that Elsie and her aunt and uncle arrived before he'd gone and you ought to have seen their faces when I told them he was from Scotland Yard. You'd have screamed.

FLETTEN (*who is wearing the same sort of face they had*). I know I should. Oh—very amusing.

(*MRS. RADFERN exits to kitchen with empty paper bags.*)

RADFERN (*putting up a good show*). Oh—yes, that's good. Ha, ha, ha!

FLETTEN (*not so good*). Isn't it? Ha, ha, ha!

(MRS. RADFERN *re-enters and goes back to sideboard.*)

RADFERN. Did he say what he'd come for?

MRS. RADFERN (*busy at the sideboard again*). Yes. Of course it was something and nothing. Just some inquiries he was making in connection with a commercial case. I told him to come back to-night. He'll be here any minute now, I expect. You ought to have a good chat.

RADFERN. I'm sure we shall.

MRS. RADFERN. Well, I'll go and take my things off and see what sort of a mess Lucy and Bernard have made of their room upstairs.

(*She crosses below table to R. and goes out at door R.*)

(*Pause. MRS. RADFERN has left door R. open. FLETTEN crosses stealthily below table to door R., looks off, shuts it and returns quickly to RADFERN, who has dropped down L.C. to below table.*)

FLETTEN. Look here, what's the idea?

RADFERN. I don't know.

FLETTEN. I don't believe in that commercial case he's come to make a few inquiries about.

RADFERN. Neither do I.

FLETTEN. Look here, I don't like this—

RADFERN. Now don't get into a panic. Take it easy, but keep on your toes. Listen, you've got to stay here. I can't risk letting you go now. Besides, there may be a lot to do. Now the minute we hear him, I want you to go out through the greenhouse and sit on the grass on the other side, so you can't be seen.

FLETTEN. Well, somebody'll see me.

RADFERN. Yes, but this chap won't or anybody he's got with him. Doesn't matter about the neighbours. Look as if you're studying botany.

FLETTEN. I can't look as if I'm studying botany.

RADFERN. Well, look as if you're half tight and are falling asleep.

FLETTEN. I can do that all right.

(*They both turn up R.C. to greenhouse. As they near it the front door bell rings. The sound of bell turns them. FLETTEN is next to the doors and RADFERN L. of him.*)

RADFERN. And don't come out until you hear me calling you, but when you do hear me calling you, don't lose a second. Understand. Outside, quick!

(FLETTEN *goes out through greenhouse doors.*)

And Joe—Joe—keep down.

(The bell rings a second time. RADFERN shuts greenhouse doors, looks round room, hesitates, then exits door R. Noise of door and voices. RADFERN returns, followed by STACK, who passes below him to R.C. RADFERN shuts door and comes to behind armchair R.)

Take a seat, Inspector.

STACK. Thanks. *(He sits in armchair R.)*

RADFERN *(crossing below table towards sideboard)*. Have a drink?

STACK. No, thanks.

RADFERN. A cigar?

STACK. No, thanks.

RADFERN *(coming to below table)*. This is very interesting. I've never had the pleasure of talking to anybody from Scotland Yard before.

STACK. No, I don't suppose you have, Mr. Radfern.

RADFERN. Must have a very exciting life, you chaps. Different from some of us.

STACK. It's not as exciting as people seem to think. Most of it's dull routine, and very long hours at that. Not many quiet evenings at home.

RADFERN. Ah—that's a pity.

STACK. Yes, *(rising)* Mrs. Radfern was telling me this afternoon that you liked to be quiet at home, with your greenhouse, and so forth.

RADFERN *(going towards chair L. of table)*. Yes. My wife and daughter often laugh at me. They think I'm a very dull old stick.

STACK. Still, I've known wives and children go sadly wrong about men, and think they were leading one sort of life when all the time they were leading a very different sort of life. *(He sits R. of table.)*

RADFERN. Is that so? *(Sitting L. of table.)* I've never struck that myself.

STACK *(meaningly)*. Really? Are you sure?

RADFERN. Well, I can't recall a case at the moment.

STACK *(meaningly)*. You surprise me.

RADFERN. But if there's anything I can tell you, I'll be only too pleased, though I can't imagine why you've taken the trouble to come and see me.

STACK. Trouble's nothing to us, Mr. Radfern, if the case is big enough. *(He idly reaches out for book and looks at title.)*

RADFERN. I can well believe that.

STACK *(holding up book)*. Have you read this?

RADFERN. What is it? Oh—"The Great Bank Mystery." Yes, I finished it yesterday.

STACK. What do you think of it?

RADFERN. Oh—very entertaining. But like most of these things, very far-fetched. Have you read it?

STACK. Yes, I have.

RADFERN. What do you think of it?

STACK. Well, as you say, it's rather far-fetched. The swindlers work on far too big a scale, to start with.

RADFERN. Yes, I should think so.

STACK. All the same, though, it reminds me of a case we've been working at now—one or other of us—for over three years.

RADFERN. Really! Now I call that interesting. And over three years, you say.

STACK. Yes, over three years. And no trouble and reasonable expense spared. Mind you, we'll win in the end. (*Shutting book.*) We can't lose.

RADFERN. Well, Inspector, I should hope not. We taxpayers want to see something for our money.

STACK. We're sometimes very slow—

RADFERN. But you're sure. Isn't that it?

STACK (*dropping book on table*). That's it, Mr. Radfern. (*Looking down at ashtray.*) You see, for the last four years, at least, there's been a gang—a very clever, well-organized gang—who've been engaged in counterfeiting bank-notes and Treasury notes. (*He looks up at RADFERN, at the end of this speech.*)

RADFERN. No? I shouldn't have thought it could be done, these days.

STACK. This gang operates here in England and also abroad, chiefly from Amsterdam and Brussels. Some of the notes are printed there, some of them here. Here's one of their notes. Perhaps you'd like to see it. (*He brings out pocket-book and produces pound note.*)

RADFERN. I would. (*He takes the note, and while examining note, laughs.*) Well, y'know, if this is a fake, it would take me in. I'm no expert, of course, but I'm in the paper trade, you know.

STACK (*significantly*). So I understand, Mr. Radfern.

RADFERN. I wouldn't have hesitated a minute giving anybody eight half-crowns for this chap. Isn't it marvellous what they can do. Never would have thought it!

STACK. Surprising, isn't it? Oh—they're a clever lot.

RADFERN. They must be. (*He hands back note.*)

STACK. Humph!

RADFERN. Humph!

STACK (*rustling the note between his fingers to indicate quality of paper*). They've been clever at getting the right sort of paper, and with their engraving and printing, and with the way they've distributed the slush.

RADFERN. Slush?

STACK. Slush. And the Treasury and the banks haven't given us a minute's peace about this case. But at last we're getting results.

RADFERN. Splendid!

STACK. Yes, hundreds of little details that haven't meant anything much for months are now beginning to look like something.

RADFERN. Just like a jigsaw puzzle, eh?

STACK. That's it. Of course there are still a few pieces missing, but not many—not many. It's only a matter of time now.

RADFERN. That's good, isn't it? You must be feeling very pleased with yourselves, eh?

STACK. We'd feel better still if we could just mop it all up now.

RADFERN (*stooping to adjust his bootlace, sympathetically*). Of course you would.

STACK. You see—this is how it often works in these cases—I hope I'm not boring you, Mr. Radfern.

RADFERN. Not at all, Inspector. Very interesting.

STACK. It works like this. We come across a nice little nest of clues in—say—Birmingham—

RADFERN. Birmingham. I was there only to-day.

STACK. And among these clues is a name, just one of several names in a notebook. And that name may turn up somewhere else—perhaps in Glasgow—perhaps in Amsterdam. Well, the owner of that name is perhaps passing himself off as an ordinary respectable citizen and business man. And he thinks he's safe. Do you follow me?

RADFERN (*beaming, but with sardonic emphasis*). Yes, I should think I do. Poor devil. I can see it all. This chap imagines he's safe. And of course he isn't because you've got a lot of evidence against him.

STACK. Yes, a lot of evidence.

RADFERN (*leaning on table, stroking his chin with his right hand—as before, but with more emphasis*). And of course it's solid evidence, cast-iron solid evidence that wouldn't make you look silly if you took such a quiet respectable chap into a police court.

STACK (*now taking up the challenge*). No, that's not quite it; because in this instance, we haven't bothered to pile up the solid evidence yet. But we've got one or two interesting little bits. Would you like to hear them?

RADFERN. I would, Inspector.

STACK. Well—for example—we know that a member of this counterfeiting ring arrived in Glasgow from the Continent on the twenty-third of last month and was met by one of his confederates here. And we're pretty sure we can prove that this quiet respectable citizen we're talking about was also there, in Glasgow, on the twenty-third of last month.

RADFERN. In Glasgow on the twenty-third of last month? You know, that reminds me of something. The twenty-third? (*He takes out pocket diary and consults it.*) Not that I was in Glasgow. As a matter of fact I was in—

STACK (*quickly, triumphantly, leaning forward over table*). New-

castle. (*He rises.*) And so was this man who came from the Continent. Not in Glasgow at all. That was a little trap and you walked straight into it.

RADFERN (*very calmly*). Did I? I'm afraid I don't quite follow you there, Inspector. Bit too sharp for me, I expect.

STACK (*grimly*). I shouldn't be surprised.

RADFERN. But what I was going to say was that I remember the twenty-third of last month because the Bowling Club here had an outing that day—up the river first and then finished off at the Palladium—and I was with them. About twenty of us, there were.

STACK (*crossing down r., disappointed*). Humph!

RADFERN. Humph! (*Quietly, but forcibly.*) Now that's what I was meaning, you know, Inspector. Isn't that what they call an alibi?

(STACK moves up R.C.)

Well, you know, if I was that man and you were silly enough to rush me into court, that's the sort of thing—an alibi like that—which would make you all look very foolish, I imagine. Mind you, I know nothing about it—but I've read some of these detective tales.

STACK (*suddenly swinging round and coming down to above table R. of and above RADFERN*). If you were that man we're talking about, do you know what I'd say to you?

RADFERN. I can't imagine.

STACK. I'd say to you straight out, look here, we *know* you've been in this, but as yet we can't prove it, though sooner or later we'll be able to prove it. But as the case has dragged on long enough and we want quick results, don't wait like a fool until we can put you in the dock, where nobody's going to have any mercy on you, but tell us all you know *now*—help us to clean the whole thing up—and we won't even *try* to prove anything against you.

RADFERN (*not looking at him*). Well, of course, I can't answer for this man—

STACK (*sardonically*). Never mind. Make an effort and try.

RADFERN. I fancy the first thing he'd say is (*turning to face him*) . . . you're bluffing.

STACK. And do you know what I'd reply to that, just to show him we weren't bluffing? First, I'd simply give him two addresses: Fifty-nine, Pool Road, Glasgow. And, Seventeen, Bellingham Street, Newcastle.

(*Pause. STACK returns to chair R. of table and sits—arms folded on table—without taking his eyes off RADFERN. RADFERN folds his arms on table in imitation.*)

RADFERN (*admiringly*). Just two addresses, like that. Isn't that interesting now?

STACK (*grimly*). Oh—he'd find it interesting all right. Then

I'd give him two names. Peter Korderman and William Frazerly. No bluffing there, you see. (*Sitting back.*) We know about Korderman and Frazerly.

RADFERN (*keeping it up*). You know, Inspector, this is as good as any of the films and detective tales to me. Better. It's a treat. Go on.

STACK. All right. Seeing that I'm putting some of my cards on the table, I might as well put this one. (*He produces half a playing card, the Knave of Diamonds, from his note-case.*) What do you think of that?

RADFERN (*examining the card*). Half a Jack of Diamonds. That's grand. But you're not going to tell me these chaps you're after use a thing like this?

STACK (*ironically*). We've got an idea they do. Sort of visiting-card, you know, Mr. Radfern. Quite romantic, isn't it?

RADFERN (*shaking his head*). That's the trouble. It seems a bit too romantic to me.

STACK. What do you mean?

RADFERN (*apologetically*). Well, of course, I don't know anything about these things—

STACK (*grimly*). No, no. We know all about that.

RADFERN. But I'd say offhand that this torn-card business looks like a bit of leg-pulling. Too much in the story-book style, you know. Sherlock Holmes. Edgar Wallace. I can imagine some chaps—you know, chaps who like a bit of fun—just planting something like this card on you, to keep you guessing and to amuse you. (*Gives the card back.*) And that Carl Korderman you mentioned—

STACK. Peter Korderman.

RADFERN. Peter Korderman, then. Well, (*shaking his head*) he doesn't sound quite real to me, you know, Inspector. Perhaps that's another bit of leg-pulling.

(STACK rises, pushes his chair under table and stands behind it. It is important that this should be his first sign of anger in this scene.)

STACK. Now listen, Radfern. Let's drop this nonsense and talk straight.

RADFERN. Go on.

STACK (*accusingly*). You're in this counterfeiting game. I know damned well you are, and you know I know. That's straight talking, isn't it?

RADFERN. I don't know whether it's straight or not, but it seems to be very offensive talking.

STACK. Well, here's some more. We want convictions, of course, but what we want even more than that is to break up the ring as soon as possible, (*breaking it*) because the Treasury and the banks are at us all the time. (*Turning.*) Tell us all you know now, put the game into our hands, and we'll forget about you. (*Returning*

to behind chair R. of table.) And you know what it means if we don't forget about you. There'll be none of this my-first-offence-and-I-didn't-know-any-better humbug for you if you do find yourself in court. You'll get as much as the judge can give you, and that's plenty. Now what do you say?

(RADFERN rises, pushes his chair under table and stands behind it.)

RADFERN (*impressively*). This is what I say, Inspector Stack. My name is George Radfern, and I'm in the paper trade and can prove it. I live at "Ferndale," Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green, where I'm well known as a decent respectable citizen and a householder. I've been swindled myself in my time, but if ever I've injured any man, woman or child in this country, then it's news to me. And you haven't enough evidence against me to take me to that door. And you know it.

STACK. Give me a bit more time, and I'll take you a lot further than that door.

(*There is a knock at the door R.*)

RADFERN. Come in.

(*Mrs. RADFERN looks in, smiling.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Oh—good evening, Inspector.

STACK. Good evening, Mrs. Radfern.

MRS. RADFERN. Excuse me interrupting you for a minute, but I've left my scissors somewhere down here. (*Comes in, looks for them on desk, and finds them.*) Here they are.

(*She comes down to above table, where RADFERN joins her.*)

Are you having an interesting talk, Dad?

RADFERN. Very interesting.

MRS. RADFERN (*returning to door R.*). That's good. I won't interrupt again.

RADFERN. Oh, Mother. (*Coming down L.O. to below table.*) You know all that stuff from the shipping companies—all those little books—that Elsie got to amuse herself with?

MRS. RADFERN (*at door R.*). Yes, a whole heap of them. She's still got them in her bedroom.

RADFERN. Good. Well, tell her to bring them down with her when she comes. Not just yet. Later on.

MRS. RADFERN. All right. (*Nods and smiles at them both, then goes out.*)

(*Mrs. RADFERN should leave door shut but not latched—to facilitate double exit of STACK and RADFERN, later.*)

STACK (*coming down to R. of RADFERN, who is below table*). Well, what do you say?

RADFERN (*sitting downstage edge of table*). You heard me ask for all those little books from the shipping companies that my daughter's been collecting. She's always worrying me to take her away somewhere, and I think she could do with a change. So could I, and business is slack now. (*Rising and looking up at him—close to him.*) I've a good mind to go away on a nice long sea voyage.

STACK (*looking down at him*). Oh, you have, have you? Far?

RADFERN. Oh—I don't know. I should think so. Australia perhaps. Or the Far East. Might find something new in the way of business. And see the world, you know.

STACK. Always wanted to do it myself. I'd hate to have to stop another man going.

RADFERN. I shouldn't like to see you even try, Inspector. Just for your own sake.

STACK. Awkward things, though, ships. You can't get off them when you like, that's the trouble. And now that we've got wireless, they can't get out of hearing.

RADFERN. Yes, that's true. (*He turns away.*)

STACK. An English ship, you know, is as safe to us as an English police court.

RADFERN (*turning back to look up at him again*). No! An English ship as safe as an English police court— Then you'll know where to find me if you want me, won't you?

STACK. I think so. (*Crossing to door R.*) Well, that's that.

RADFERN (*following to L. of STACK, who should be about two paces from door*). And thank you very much for calling, Inspector. I've enjoyed this. A peep behind the scenes. Something to tell my friends about.

STACK (*as he moves to door*). Good. Any friend of yours, Mr. Radfern, is interesting to me. (*Looking down on him.*) You wouldn't like to take me round and introduce me, would you?

RADFERN (*looking up at him*). I shouldn't think that would be necessary, Inspector.

(*Holding this look, they step out together, STACK just a little in front, leaving door behind open. You hear them give one another ironically polite good nights, then you hear the sound of the front door being closed and locked. RADFERN returns hastily and closes the sitting-room door behind him. He is now a man of rapid decisive action. He goes towards telephone—then changes his mind and goes quickly to doors of greenhouse and calls JOE. He then goes to desk, where he gets three passports from drawer and comes down to below table, putting them in his pocket. JOE FLETTEN comes in, brushing his trousers with his hands, his hat on the back of his head.*)

FLETTEN (*coming to R. of RADFERN, below table, excitedly*). What's happened? What does he know?

RADFERN. Quite enough. Now listen, Joe, and keep your head screwed on. It's up to you now. Go straight to Westerburg—

and it doesn't matter where he is or what he's doing, you've got to see him—

FLETTEN. I know where Westerburg is. Always at the same place, Monday nights.

RADFERN. Tell him I've had a Scotland Yard man here. They've got the Glasgow and Newcastle addresses, and they know about Korderman and Frazerly—

FLETTEN. The hell they do! We're done, then.

RADFERN. No, we're not. That's all they do know *yet*. And that's got to be all too. Tell Westerburg it's Plan B now or nothing.

FLETTEN. What! Sink the plates and presses, and scatter!

RADFERN. Yes, he knows what to do. And tell him that anyhow I'm working on Plan B from to-night, and he'd better wire Amsterdam for me. And I'll ring up Middleton myself now. Have you got that? (*He goes up L. of table to telephone.*)

FLETTEN. Yes. (*He goes up R. to greenhouse.*)

RADFERN. And you'd better put Plan B into action yourself, Joe, if you don't want to see Maidstone and Parkhurst again.

FLETTEN. You bet your life I will.

RADFERN (*pointing to greenhouse—then starting to dial*). That way then, and as quick as you can. There's a narrow lane at the back. Turn to the right at the top and you're at the Tube Station in three minutes. And for God's sake, make haste, but don't look as if you think the nearest bobby's going to put his hand on your shoulder.

(*He holds out his hand. FLETTEN comes to him and takes it.*)

Good luck, Joe. Shan't see you for a long time—I hope.

FLETTEN. All the best, Mr. Radfern. (*He hurries to greenhouse, but pulls himself up and walks out unconcernedly.*)

(RADFERN has got his number by now.)

RADFERN (*at telephone*). I want to speak to Mr. Middleton, please . . . Hello, is that you, Charlie? Yes, Radfern. Yes, everything all right at Birmingham . . . But listen, Charlie . . .

(MRS. RADFERN and ELSIE enter from R. *The latter is carrying a lot of shipping booklets, etc. She is listless and looks miserable. MRS. RADFERN comes to back of chair R. of table, ELSIE remains at door. They stand there quietly not to interrupt the conversation.*)

I've just had an Inspector from Scotland Yard . . . Yes . . . And you know how these chaps get about a bit, and he was saying that he didn't think business would be very good these next few months . . . Yes, so I thought I'd take that holiday I've been promising myself for some time . . .

(MRS. RADFERN looks to ELSIE.)

Yes, what we used to call Plan B—you remember our little joke

. . . Holland, of course . . . All right, Charlie . . . Good-bye.
(*He puts down telephone instrument.*)

(*ELSIE comes forward and puts pamphlets on top R. of table: she then goes above it down to armchair L. and sits.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*jovially*). You didn't get arrested then, Dad?

RADFERN (*dropping down to top of table—looking at pamphlets—in same tone*). No, just managed to escape.

MRS. RADFERN. What did the Inspector want?

RADFERN. What you said. Just making some inquiries about a commercial case he's on. Queer life they have, those chaps.

ELSIE (*joining in, but still listless*). Wouldn't suit you, Dad. Too much excitement. Not enough peace and quietness.

RADFERN. That's it.

MRS. RADFERN (*going up to R. of him, above table, chaffing*). You didn't tell him what a tough old crook you were yourself, did you?

RADFERN. No need to. He knew it already.

(*MRS. RADFERN takes ashtrays from table to desk.*)

ELSIE (*still listless*). What were you saying on the telephone about going away?

RADFERN (*going down to her, kneeling on pouf with affectionate concern*). Look here, Elsie. You've got to brighten up, because there's a lot to do.

ELSIE (*indifferently*). What is there to do?

RADFERN (*rising—going to C. below table*). Well, one of the things you've got to do is to take your mother to Brussels to-morrow.

ELSIE (*a changed girl*). Dad! You don't mean it!

RADFERN. I do. We're going to close this house and go on our travels.

MRS. RADFERN. Good gracious me! (*She comes down R.O. to below table.*)

ELSIE (*rising*). Dad!

RADFERN. Now, we've got passports.

ELSIE. Where are they marked for?

RADFERN. Everywhere. (*He has come to below L. of table and puts his arm round ELSIE, L. of him, and the other arm round MRS. RADFERN, R. of him.*) You see—we're going to close this house, pack up and go on a long sea voyage—East Indies, Far East, Australia—God knows where. Only we're starting on one of those Dutch boats.

MRS. RADFERN. Dutch boats! Why not an English boat?

RADFERN. Oh, all the best boats that go out East are Dutch. They're much more comfortable. English boats are like police courts! You and your mother are going to Brussels first, and then you're going to meet me later, over there.

MRS. RADFERN. But how are you going?

RADFERN. I'm going straight to Holland. Some business to attend to first. A friend of mine will take me.

ELSIE. But how?

RADFERN. By Underground, perhaps. Never mind about that.

ELSIE. Oh—I don't mind about anything. (*Embraces him.*) Mother, we're going to travel. (*Embraces her and they pirouette together, ELSIE finishing up on R. of her mother.*)

MRS. RADFERN. I hope this isn't another of your jokes, Dad?

ELSIE. Oh, Dad, I'll never forgive you if it is.

RADFERN. It isn't. You've got twenty-four hours to pack up in and close this house and get off to Brussels.

ELSIE (*babbling happily*). Then we won't go to bed at all. (*She goes up R. of table to above it.*) And let's look at these things (*holding up shipping booklets*) and then we'll have supper and begin packing.

(*RADFERN goes up L. of table to L. of ELSIE. MRS. RADFERN follows up to L. of RADFERN.*)

But we'll have to have some clothes, won't we, Mother, especially if we're going to hot countries, but I suppose we could get them in Brussels or wherever we're going—couldn't we go to Paris first and then we could buy some clothes there and it would be nearly as easy to get from Paris to Holland or wherever it is—

MRS. RADFERN (*loudly*). Oh, Elsie, stop it. My head's going round.

(*There is a ring at the front door, very loud and persistent. It startles them all.*)

ELSIE. I'll go.

(*She runs off at door R.*)

MRS. RADFERN. That child's so excited she doesn't know what she's talking about.

RADFERN. Do her good.

MRS. RADFERN. It won't if she's disappointed again.

RADFERN. I'll see to that.

MRS. RADFERN. You're very masterful to-night, Dad, aren't you? What's the matter?

RADFERN (*above table, looking through pamphlets*). Have to assert myself sometimes, Mother.

(*ELSIE returns a moment later, coming in to R.C., looking frightened.*)

ELSIE. Dad, it's a police sergeant and he wants to see you.

RADFERN (*gravely, steadily*). All right.

ELSIE (*going over to him, softly*). Dad—it's not true—after all—is it?

RADFERN (*cheerfully*). That's all right, Elsie. Ask him to come in.

(*ELSIE is clinging to his arm.*)

MRS. RADFERN. Don't be ridiculous, Elsie.

(She goes L. of and below table to door R. and admits the SERGEANT, a heavily built, middle-aged man with a deep voice and a rather pompous manner. She returns behind RADFERN and ELSIE to up L.O. At noise of SERGEANT shutting door, ELSIE breaks from RADFERN who steps below her to face the SERGEANT R.O.)

SERGEANT MORRIS *(near door)*. Mr. George Radfern.

RADFERN *(steadily)*. That's me, Sergeant.

SERGEANT MORRIS. I think you've seen me before. I'm from the local station.

RADFERN. Know you well by sight.

SERGEANT MORRIS. I've just heard that you might be going away soon.

RADFERN. That's right. I'm seriously thinking of it, Sergeant.

SERGEANT MORRIS *(taking off helmet and stepping towards him)*. Well, Mr. Cross at the end house said you'd like to be one of the patrons and vice-presidents of the new Shooters Green Football Club.

RADFERN. Oh—you've come round to make sure of my subscription.

SERGEANT MORRIS *(relieved)*. That's it, Mr. Radfern. Three guineas—for a vice-president.

RADFERN *(producing money)*. Must be a vice-president. There you are. There's a fiver for luck.

SERGEANT MORRIS *(who has been writing)*. That's the official receipt. And thank you very much, Mr. Radfern. Good night, mum; good night, miss. Good night.

(He goes out, and Mrs. RADFERN follows him off R. ELSIE gives an hysterical laugh, really of relief, and sits L. of table.)

RADFERN *(coming above table to L. of it)*. What are you laughing at? *(He sits on table above and facing ELSIE.)*

ELSIE. I don't know. Everything. Oh—Dad—how long shall we be away?

RADFERN. Don't know yet. Four months. Six months.

ELSIE. Oh—what about your greenhouse?

RADFERN. Where we're going it'll be all greenhouse.

(Enter Mrs. RADFERN from R.)

ELSIE. And what about Laburnum Grove?

Mrs. RADFERN *(at door, briskly)*. It'll be still here when we come back.

ELSIE *(rising and taking some pamphlets to pouf, she sits and looks at them—excitedly)*. Let's look at all these things.

Mrs. RADFERN *(firmly)*. It's my turn now. We don't look at anything until we've had some supper.

(MRS. RADFERN crosses down L., below table to ELSIE, to take pamphlets from her. RADFERN is picking up some pamphlets which ELSIE had left on table and taking them to desk: he then returns and takes book to desk.)

And you can help me to get it ready for once.

ELSIE (*happily*). All right, Mother.

(*She embraces her and hurries into kitchen, where she can be heard singing happily.*)

MRS. RADFERN (*getting tablecloth from sideboard*). And you needn't tell me you haven't been up to something, you know, Dad. (*She has brought tablecloth to L. of table—puts it on table, still folded.*)

(RADFERN has returned to B. of table and picks up rose-bowl and hands it to her on last line.)

RADFERN (*grinning at her*). All right, Mother. I needn't tell you.

CURTAIN.

PROPERTY PLOT

(See photograph.)

Round table—5 feet diameter, c.
Sideboard—without back, up L.
Writing-table, or desk, up R.
Bookcase—Globe-Wernicke—3 sections, R.
Small bookcase, down L.
Small round occasional tables, one down L. for wireless—the other up L. for telephone.
Low coffee-table, down L.
Kitchen cabinet, off L.
Window-seat, up c.
Low Bergère armchairs, L. and R.
Large, solid pouf, L.C.
5 dining-room chairs: 3 at table, 1 at desk and 1 L. of desk.
Kitchen chair (optional).
Footstool, under round table to L.
Waste-paper basket, at desk.
Palms, in greenhouse.
Hanging ferns, in greenhouse.
Stage covered with beige felt.
3 rugs; 1 c., 1 at desk and 1 by sideboard.
In kitchen—black and white squared linoleum.
In greenhouse—red tiled stagecloth.
In hall—parquet linoleum.
Electrical fittings as in photograph.
At Window—pelmet with curtains to cover opening.
Pictures—flower oil-painting over writing-table. Gilt-framed landscape over sideboard. Smaller ditto over bookcase R.

ACT I

On Table c.

Small table-mat and low bowl filled with roses, c.
2 ashtrays with boxes of matches, R. and L.
Box of marshmallows (halved), down L.

On Sideboard (vide Diagram).

TRAY "A," with 5 tumblers, jug of water, set of cruets and 5 table-napkins.
Decanter of whisky.
Siphon of soda.
2 bottles of beer.
Jug filled with beer.
5 meat-plates, 5 bread-plates and dish (with $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. cut ham and $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. cut tongue), in one pile.
5 dessert plates and dish of stewed rhubarb (sliced bananas with coloured juice), in another pile.

Plate with bread and bread-knife, 10 half-slices.

Cheese-dish with cheese and knife.

TRAY "B," with 5 large knives, 5 small knives, 6 large forks, 5 small forks, 5 dessert spoons, 4 tablespoons, set of cruet, butter-dish with butter and butter-knife, 6 raffia table mats (one dish size).

Salad bowl with lettuce and servers.

Tall cut-glass fruit-bowl with apples, oranges and bunch of small bananas on top (a faked banana may be placed for BAXLEY. The skin can be carefully slit down and only half the banana replaced in the top end of the skin.)

Dressing—2 large candelabra.

Silver Tray "C," with silver teapot, cream-jug and sugar-bowl.

Circular lace mat under fruit-bowl.

Biscuit-jar.

On Desk.

Silver cigarette-box.

Glass vase with carnations.

Table-lamp.

Dressing—row of books with book-ends, blotting-pad, notepaper, envelopes, inkstand, etc.

Bookcase, R.

Dressing—filled with books, ornament on top.

Bookcase, L.

Dressing—filled with books, ashtray on top.

Occasional Table, down L.

Dressing—wireless cabinet, ashtray.

Occasional Table, up L.

Hand microphone, dial telephone.

Telephone directories.

Coffee-Table.

Pack of playing-cards—set out in 7 piles.

Kitchen Cabinet.

Suitable dressing.

Off Stage R.

Hall—loud clockwork front-door bell—and ditto stand-by. (May be worked on biscuit tin.) Greenhouse—3 small tomatoes.

Off Stage up L.C.

Loud telephone bell—behind flat behind table. This may also stand on a biscuit tin.

Hand Properties.

RADFERN—Pipe, tobacco, matches.

BAXLEY—Small notebook, cigarettes in case and matches.

HAROLD—Cigarettes in case and matches.

ACT II

SCENE I

Remove—Coffee table and chair which was set R. of window in Act I.

Table C.

Clear away meal and remove rose-bowl. Set tablecloth and cabinets and matches.

Sideboard.

Clear away meal.

Set—Tray with 3 tumblers, decanter of whisky, soda-syphon and bottle of beer—upstage end.

Fruit-bowl with fruit and bunch of bananas on lace mat c.

Dressing—2 candelabra, biscuit-jar and silver teaset as before.

Desk.

Remove—Vase of carnations.

Bookcase.

Despatch-case.

Kitchen Cabinet.

Tray set for breakfast for one—cup, saucer, spoon, 2 small plates, eggcup, eggspoon, cruet, table-napkin, small knife, marmalade-jar, milk-jug (empty).

Armchair, R.

RADFEEN's boots—onstage side of it. (These should have had the polish applied to them to dull them and facilitate BAXLEY's cleaning them.)

Footstool.

Set—handy to chair L. of table.

Off Stage, R.

Hall—Loud knocker.

Pint bottle of milk.

Lock and bolt—noise.

3 letters.

Off Stage L.

Kitchen—2 boot-brushes and duster.

Cup, saucer and spoon.

Toast in rack.

Teapot with hot tea.

Overall—for MRS. RADFEEN.

Hand Properties.

RADFEEN—2 pound notes.

BAXLEY—Cigarette-case with cigarettes and matches.

SCENE 2

Remove—Slippers from under table.

Table c.

Clear away breakfast things and cloth.

Set—Small mat and rose-bowl, 2 ashtrays and matches, banana-skin—down L.

Desk.

Set—Work-basket—containing socks to darn and threaded needle.

Re-set—Vase of carnations.

Window-seat.

Book—"The Great Bank Mystery."

Hand Properties.

STACK—Note-case containing visiting-card.

ACT III

Windows.

Curtains drawn.

Table c.

Remove—Mat from under rose-bowl.

Visiting-card against ashtray L.

Book—up B.

Sideboard.

Remove—Work-basket.

Tablecloth in drawer.

Empty fruit-bowl except for a bunch of 3 bananas.

Desk.

Scissors.

Sufficient cigarettes in box to fill BAXLEY'S case and leave box empty.

3 passports in drawer.

Bookcase B.

Standing in front of it—

Large suitcase—with Eastern labels.

Lady's hat-box.

BAXLEY'S raincoat with empty cigarette-case in pocket.

Window-seat.

Remove—in order not to bulge curtains.

Off Stage, B.

Hall—Large suitcase with Eastern labels—preferably "Singapore."

Umbrella.

BAXLEY'S hat.

Small attaché-case for MRS. BAXLEY.

Bag of apples and oranges and bag of bananas for MRS. RADFERN.

Handful of shipping pamphlets for ELSIE.

Despatch-case for RADFERN.

Door-bell—as before.

Hand Properties.

HAROLD—Hat, cigarettes in case.

STACEY—Note-case containing pound note and half a Jack of Diamonds—
halved diagonally.

FLETCHER—Hat.

SERGEANT MORRIS—Receipt-book and pencil.

